
Chapter 10

**ACCESS TO AND EASE OF PURCHASE OF
CIGARETTES**

CHAPTER 10: ACCESS TO AND EASE OF PURCHASE OF CIGARETTES

Introduction

Banning or limiting the ability of minors to purchase cigarettes is a seemingly simple and politically popular measure aimed at curbing teen smoking. By California law, the minimum age for the purchase of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco is 18 years old. Any person—other than a parent or guardian—who gives, barter, or sells tobacco products to a minor is subject to fines. In 1990, the majority of Californians felt that the enforcement of laws prohibiting the sale of cigarettes was inadequate, and three quarters of smokers felt that vending machine sales to minors should be banned (Burns & Pierce, 1992).

In 1994, California's Legislature enacted the Stop Tobacco Access to Kids Enforcement (STAKE) Act. This legislation was designed to strengthen the ban on the sales of tobacco products to minors. The Department of Health Services was designated to enforce the Act. As part of its enforcement duties, the Department of Health Services began to conduct random "sting" inspections, beginning in December of 1995 (TEROC, 1997). Subsequent to the passage of the STAKE Act, the fines and terms of permit revocation were increased in 1996 (ALA, AHA, and ACS, 1996). Compliance checks were carried out through 1997, and the identification of illegal sales dropped from 37% in 1995 to 29% in early 1997.

The STAKE Act and the increased fines are two tangible measures the state has taken to implement its commitment to more effectively control the sale of tobacco to minors. Despite these activities, however, evidence presented in this chapter suggests that enforcement of bans on the sale of tobacco products to teens may not effectively limit their access to cigarettes. A recent study showed that in communities with improved enforcement of access laws, illegal sales of cigarettes decreased to only 18% in test buys. In control communities, without increased enforcement, illegal cigarette sales occurred in 55% of test buys. However, the decrease in illegal purchases that resulted from the increased enforcement did not significantly reduce teens' ability to obtain cigarettes or reduce their smoking behavior (Rigotti et al., 1997).

This chapter discusses the efficacy of laws restricting teens' ability to purchase cigarettes, and the impact of such laws on teens' access to cigarettes. Section 1 explores teens' perceptions of the ease of obtaining cigarettes. Section 2 analyzes the ways in which teens obtain the cigarettes they smoke. Section 3 examines where teens buy cigarettes. Section 4 presents conclusions from this chapter.

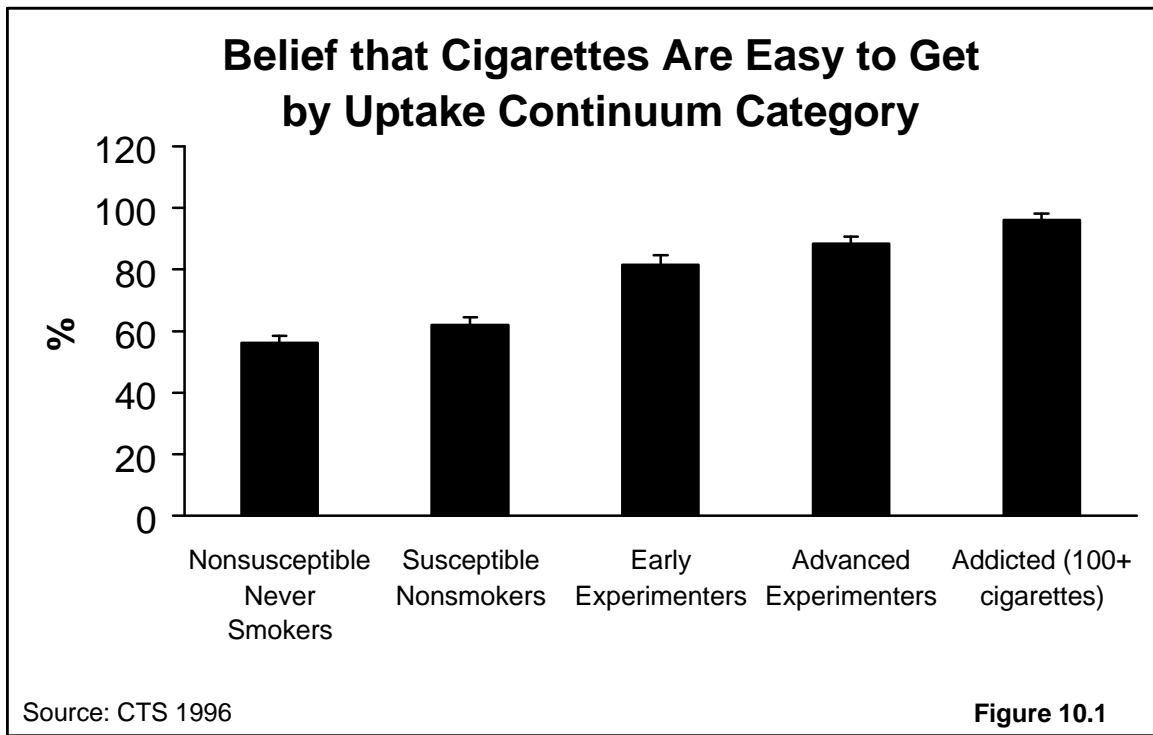
1. Teens' Perceptions of the Ease of Obtaining Cigarettes

To assess teens' perceptions about how easy it is to obtain cigarettes, the 1990, 1993 and 1996 CTS asked:

Do you think it would be easy or hard for you to get cigarettes if you wanted some?

Only teens who had never smoked or only had puffed on a cigarette were consistently asked the above question in each survey. The percentage of this group who thought cigarettes were easy to get did not change significantly between 1990 and 1996. In 1990, 59.7% believed cigarettes were easy to get, in 1993 57.9% held this belief, and in 1996 57.8% did.

The 1996 CTS asked the question of all respondents, and Figure 10.1 shows the percentage of teens who think cigarettes are easy to get for each category of the Uptake Continuum (Chapter 3).



Clearly teens who had smoked a cigarette were more likely, no doubt because of their own experience, to think cigarettes were easy to get. Over 80% of *early experimenters* and 88% of *advanced experimenters* thought cigarettes were easy to get. Finally, 96% of *addicted smokers*, who are the most likely to face the problem of having to get cigarettes, held this view.

The 1996 CTS included an additional question that asked teens:

Would you say it would be easy, somewhat difficult or hard for you to **buy** a pack of cigarettes?

In 1996, the majority (51.5%) of teens, regardless of smoking experience, believed it would be easy to buy a pack of cigarettes, and 70% of ever smokers held this view.

Overall in 1996, 51.5% of adolescents thought it would be easy to buy a pack of cigarettes. The percentage of never smokers thinking it would be easy to **buy** a pack of cigarettes was significantly lower for *nonsusceptible* (42%) and *susceptible* never smokers (45%) than for those in *early experimentation* (57%), *advanced experimentation* (68%), or for *addicted smokers* (88%). Considering all teens who had ever smoked, 70% thought it would be easy to buy a pack of cigarettes.

Among *never smokers*, there was no gender difference in perceived ease of buying a pack of cigarettes. However, Non-Hispanic White and African American teens were significantly more likely than Hispanic or Asian teens to think it is easy to buy a pack. There was a significant increase with age as well: Only 22% of never smokers aged 12-13 years old thought it would be easy to buy a pack of cigarettes, compared to 48% of 14-15 year olds and 69% of 16-17 year old never smokers. Perhaps as never smoking teens get older they know more peers who smoke and who apparently have little difficulty buying cigarettes. Also, as they get older, they may assume that they are less likely to be asked for identification.

2. How Do Teens Usually Get Cigarettes?

By making it more difficult for young people to purchase cigarettes, it was expected that teens would have less access to cigarettes and therefore smoke less. Research found, however, that laws limiting the sale and purchase of cigarettes have little impact on teens' access to cigarettes (Chaloupka & Grossman, 1996; Rigotti et al., 1997). The primary reason these laws did not produce the desired effects appears to be that **relatively few teens actually purchase cigarettes.**

The 1996 CTS asked teens who had ever smoked a cigarette:

How do you usually get cigarettes?

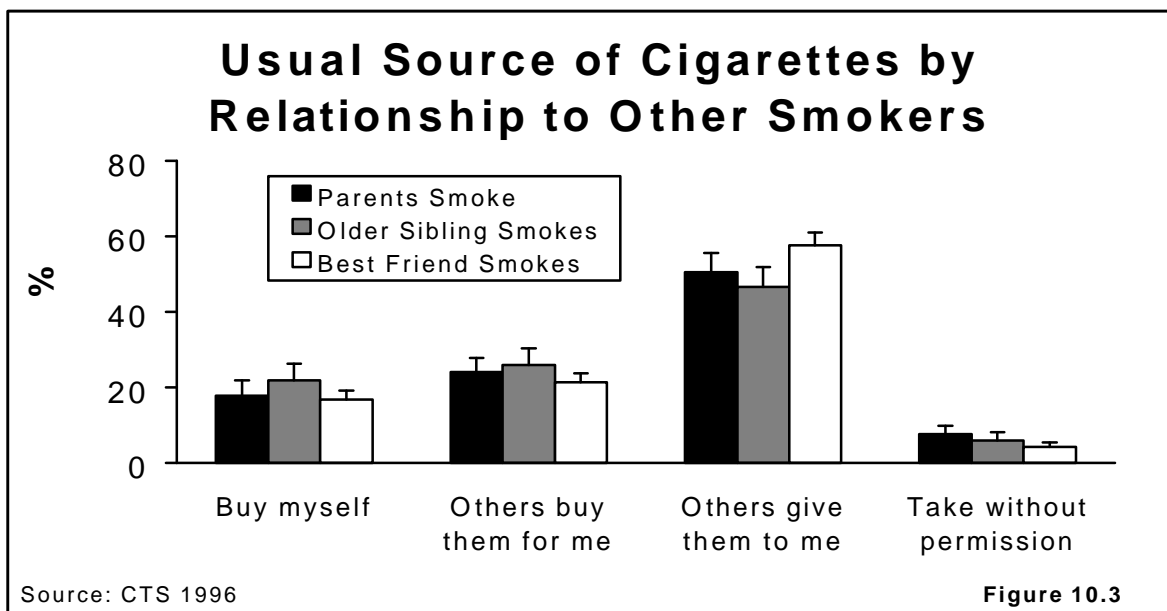
Figure 10.2 shows that, for the most part, teens who had ever smoked obtain cigarettes in one of three ways: others give them cigarettes, others buy cigarettes for them, or teens buy their own cigarettes (see Appendix B, Table 17 for detailed demographic analysis).



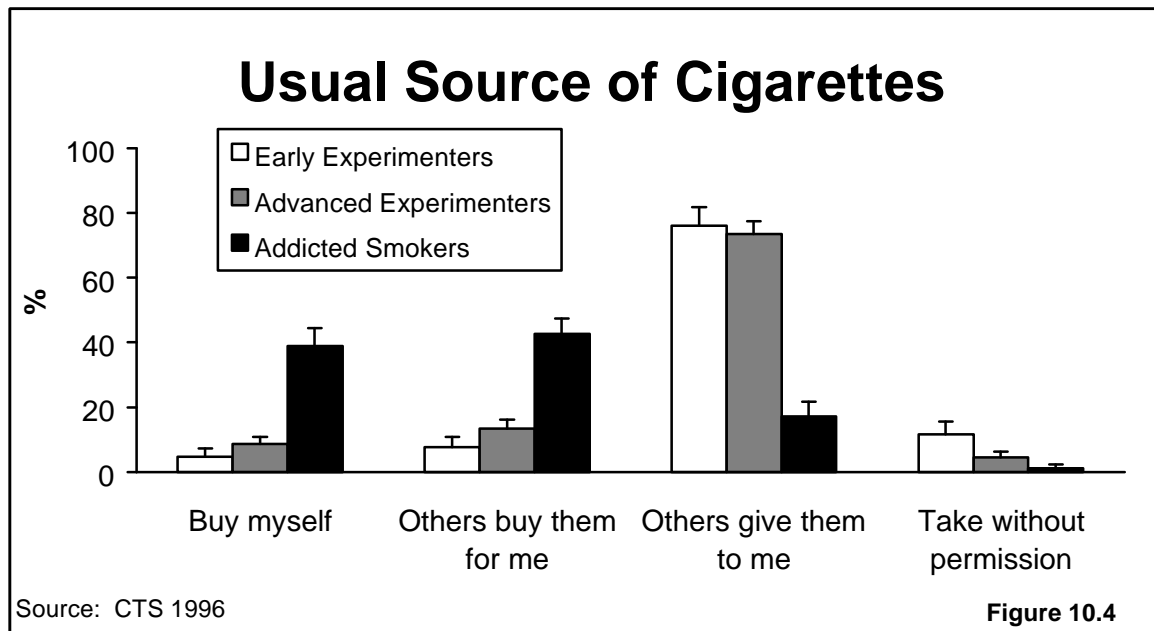
83% of teens who had ever smoked did not usually buy their own cigarettes.

Overall, 58% of teens who had ever smoked say that others give them their cigarettes, 20% say that others buy cigarettes for them, 16% buy their own cigarettes, and 5% of teens admit to taking cigarettes from friends, family, or stores without permission.

Among teens whose parents or older siblings smoke, approximately 9% obtain cigarettes from home. Figure 10.3 shows that, compared to teens whose parents smoke or who have an older sibling who smokes, those teens who have a best friend who smokes are significantly more likely to get their cigarettes from someone who gives them the cigarettes, likely the best friend.



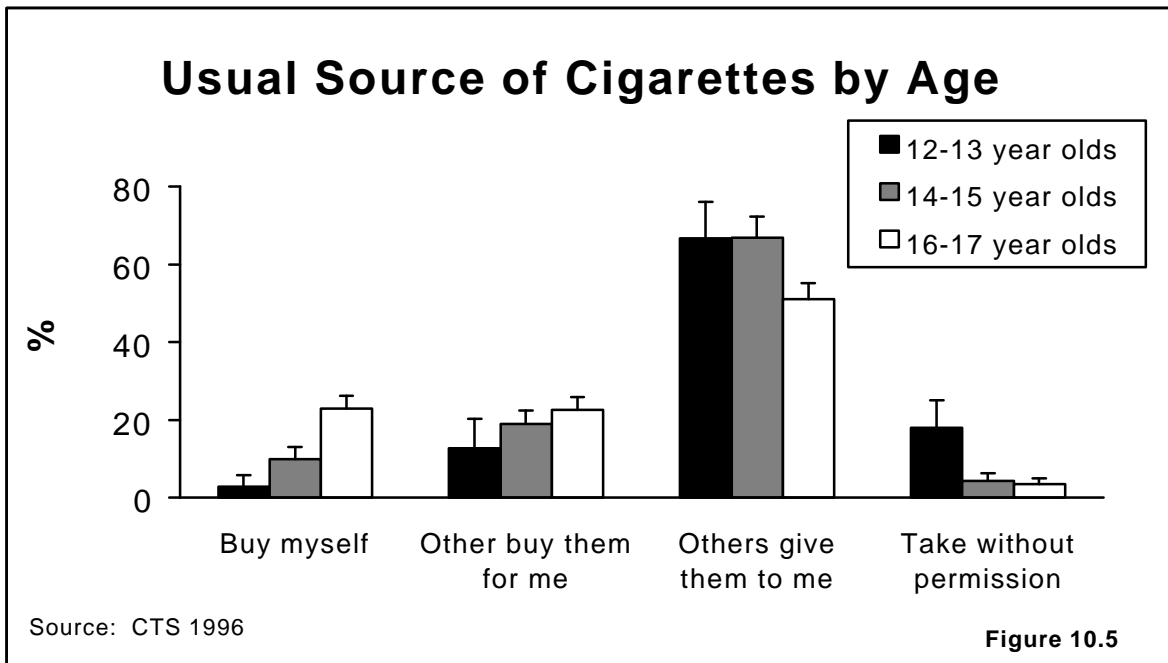
How much an adolescent smokes is strongly associated with the ways in which they obtain cigarettes. As might be expected, those teens who smoke regularly are significantly more likely to purchase cigarettes than teens who are in experimental phases. Conversely, teens who are still experimenting are significantly more likely to get their cigarettes from others than are *addicted smokers*. Figure 10.4 illustrates these results. In this figure (as explained in Chapter 3), *early experimenters* have not smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetime and have not smoked in the past 30 days; *advanced experimenters* have not yet smoked 100 cigarettes, but have smoked within the past 30 days; and *addicted smokers* have smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetime.



Over 80% of *addicted* teens usually purchase the cigarettes they smoke. In contrast, 75% of teens in the *experimentation* phases of smoking uptake usually get their cigarettes from others.

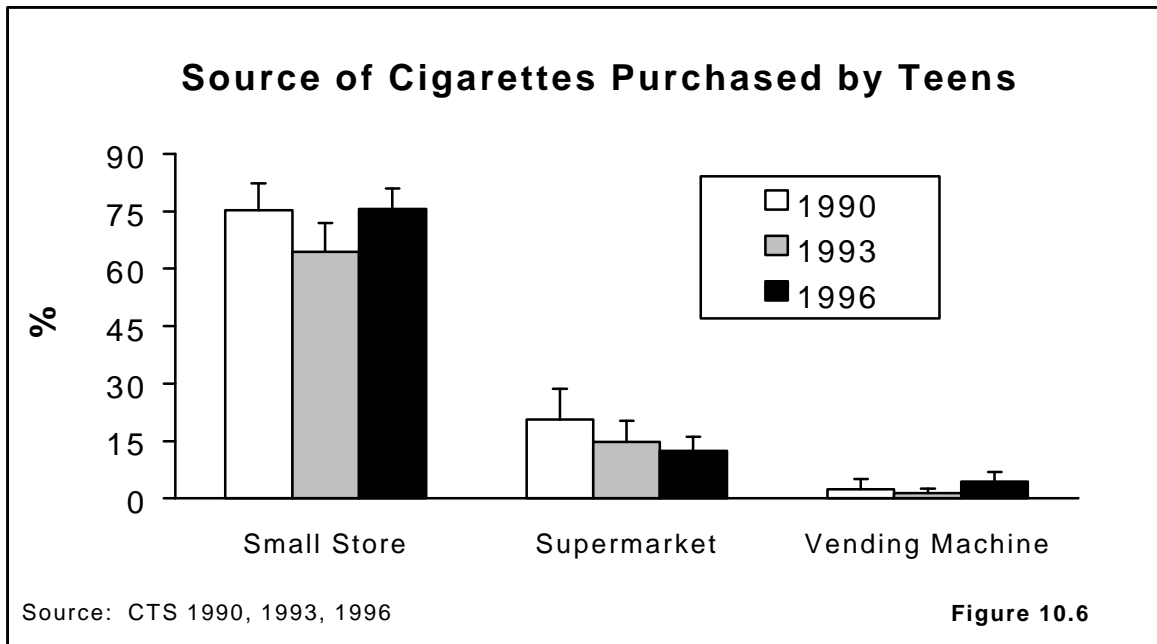
Figure 10.4 shows that only 4.7% of *early experimenters* and 8.6% of *advanced experimenters* usually buy their own cigarettes, while 39% of *addicted smokers* usually buy their own. A similar pattern is evident for those who have others buy them cigarettes. Approximately 8% of *early experimenters* and 14% of *advanced experimenters* usually have others buy cigarettes for them, but 43% of *addicted smokers* usually have others buy their cigarettes. Considering those *addicted smokers* who buy their own and those who have others buy cigarettes for them, approximately 82% of *addicted smokers* usually purchase cigarettes one way or another. These teens are smoking at rates that would probably exceed the generosity of their friends. In contrast, the vast majority of experimenters are given the few cigarettes that they smoke from others: 76% of *early experimenters* and 74% of *advanced experimenters* usually get their cigarettes this way, while only about 17% of *addicted* usually smokers get their cigarettes from others.

Figure 10.5 shows how teen ever smokers usually get their cigarettes, analyzed by age. The 1996 California Tobacco Survey found that only 3% of ever smokers in the 12-13 year old age group, 10% of 14-15 year old ever smokers and 23% of 16-17 year old ever smokers usually purchase their own cigarettes. Eighteen percent (18%) of boys who ever smoked said they usually bought their own cigarettes, compared to 14% of girls. Because more teens in the *addicted smoker* category are also older teens, the patterns in Figures 10.4 and 10.5 are very similar. It is nonetheless useful to see that significantly more ever smokers aged 16-17 usually buy their own cigarettes, compared to 12-13 year olds or 14-15 year olds. In contrast, significantly more 12-13 year olds and 14-15 year olds usually have others give them cigarettes, compared to the 16-17 year olds. Interestingly, significantly more 12-13 year olds take cigarettes without permission, compared to the older teens.



3. Where Teens Usually Buy Cigarettes

In each year of the CTS, among teens who purchase their own cigarettes, small stores, followed by supermarkets and vending machines were the favored sources of cigarettes. Gas stations and liquor stores were the most common small stores cited as the purchasing source. Figure 10.6 shows that the type of establishment where teens said they “often” bought their cigarettes remained relatively constant between 1990 and 1996.

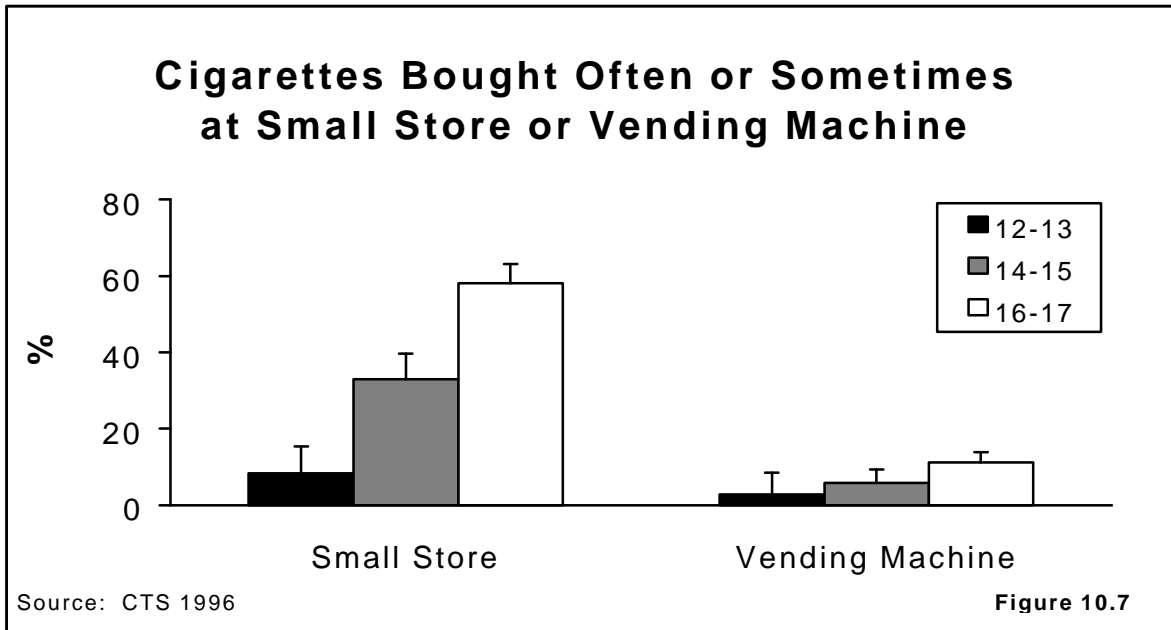


Over two-thirds of teens who buy cigarettes make their purchases in small stores, such as gas stations or liquor stores.

The figure shows no difference in the percent of teens who often purchased their cigarettes from small stores (70%) between 1990 and 1996. However, there was a small but statistically significant decline in the percent of teens who often purchased their cigarettes from supermarkets between 1990 and 1996. The patterns observed in Figure 10.6 held among establishments where teens “sometimes” buy cigarettes, as well.

These findings suggest that the larger supermarket chains may have adopted stricter corporate policies about selling cigarettes to minors, while small stores may not as consistently enforce the law. Research suggests that there would be no noticeable effect on teen cigarette purchases until store compliance was high enough that illegal sales of cigarettes to minors occurs in only about 10% of random checks. (Jason et al., 1991; DiFranza et al., 1992). Increased enforcement of laws banning the sale of cigarettes to minors and stepped-up compliance checks may never reach a level of stringency sufficient to deter minors from purchasing cigarettes (Rigotti et al., 1997).

Figure 10.7 shows insignificant differences between the percentage of 12-13 year olds who bought cigarettes in small stores versus those who bought them from vending machines in 1996. Among 14-15 year olds and 16-17 year olds, however, significantly more teens bought their cigarettes from small stores than from vending machines.



4. Summary

This chapter showed that despite the passage of the STAKE Act in 1994, minimal changes occurred between 1990 and 1996 in nonsmoking teens' perceptions of how easy it is to get cigarettes. In 1996, 51.5% of all teens thought it would be easy to buy a pack of cigarettes, and 70% of ever smokers held this view.

In 1996, only 16% of teens who ever smoked usually buy their own cigarettes. Nearly 80% of teens who smoke usually get their cigarettes from others. Most (55%) say others give them the cigarettes, but many (20%) have others buy the cigarettes for them. As might be expected, the teens who smoke the most were the most likely to buy their own cigarettes. Similarly, younger teens (12-15 years old)—who typically have less experience with smoking—were more likely to get their cigarettes from others, while older teens (16-17 years old) were more likely to report that they usually bought their own cigarettes.

The data presented in this chapter show that teen access to cigarettes is made easier by increasing rates of adolescent smoking prevalence: with more teens smoking, more teens are able to get cigarettes from their friends or acquaintances. These results suggest that public policy efforts attempting to limit access to cigarettes through limiting the ability to purchase them may produce less success than other tobacco control policies in reducing teen smoking. For instance, a major increase in the price of cigarettes from a new tax might make teens less likely to give them away.

The focus of tobacco control efforts on limiting teen access has been questioned previously (Glantz, 1996). Indeed, the tobacco industry expresses support for the goal of

limiting teen access, even though their advertising and promotional activities clearly promote smoking in this population (see Chapter 9). This tobacco industry endorsement suggests that it believes that this strategy may result in minimal changes in behavior, and produce a more respectable public perception of the industry. By making cigarettes even more “off-limits,” this strategy may actually lead to an increased interest in cigarettes among teens. Furthermore, as the war on drugs has demonstrated, major funding to restrict supply in the face of increasing demand is rarely successful. Adolescent demand is fueled by tobacco industry advertising and promotions. A message that “only adults can buy cigarettes” sets up the purchase and smoking of cigarettes as a symbol of entry into the adult world.

CHAPTER 10: REFERENCES

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