

SMOKING HABITS *in* GOZO

Professor M.N. Cauchi

Mere males all over the world have felt the need to resort to the soothing powers of smoking. Ever since the weed was introduced by Sir Walter Raleigh from the New World, smoke has filled salons, bars, buses and offices, and its noxious smell has lingered on men, their clothes, and their hair.

In Gozo and Malta we seem to have, since the war, caught up with a vengeance with the rest of the world of smokers. We share with the UK the dubious honour of being among the heaviest smokers in Europe. I blame this on the nasty habit which emanated from the U.K.-controlled Dockyard during the War period when cigarettes were distributed like confetti to unsuspecting workers, in great quantities, as a way of keeping them happy and under control. The result is that Maltese (and Gozitan) males are now well and truly hooked and show a very considerable weakness and susceptibility to the weed.

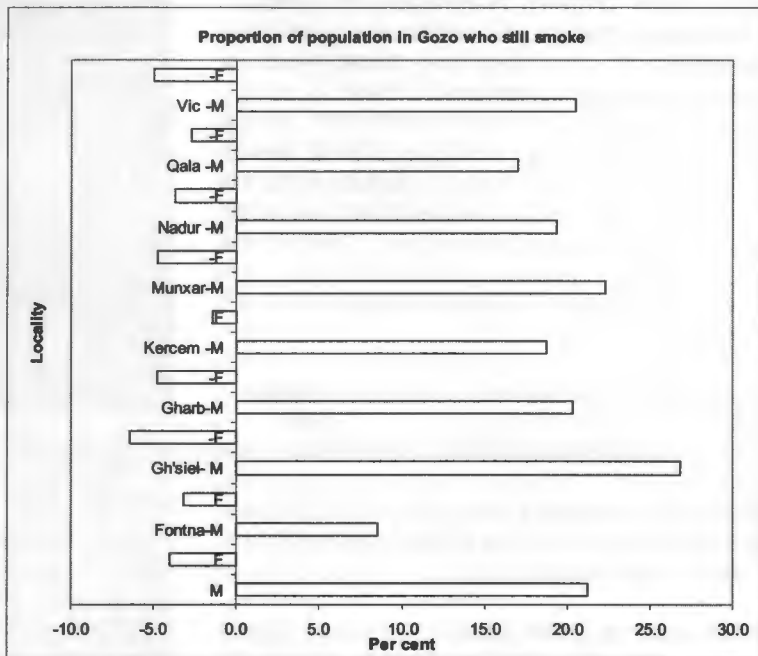
The 1995 census gives a wealth of information relating to smoking habits in the Maltese Islands. The proportion of smokers in Gozo is slightly less than that in Malta. In Gozo, the proportion of males who still smoke is 21.2 per cent, compared with 26.3 per cent for Maltese men.

There are also considerable variations between the various localities in Gozo with regards to

smoking habits. The figure below shows that the range for males varies from 8.5 per cent in Fontana to 26.8 per cent in Gh'sielem..

Women in Gozo are also less likely to smoke compared to their sisters on the mainland. The overall rate of female smokers in Gozo is 4.0% compared to 11.3% in Malta. The variation in the different localities in Gozo ranges from 2.8% in Qala to 6.4% in Gh'Sielem.

In view of the undoubted relationship between smoking and a number of health problems, including cancer of the



Proportion of smokers in the population in the various localities in Gozo. (The prevalence for male are shown on the right, females on the left).
[Source: Census 1995]

lungs and bladder, as well as various cardiovascular conditions, it is well to ask why these variations exist, and whether there is a differential in the health of persons in the various localities. Indeed, there is an indication that the incidence of cancer of the bladder is higher in males from Gh'sielem than anywhere else in Gozo², although the small number of actual cases make statistical analysis difficult to interpret.

In most developed countries throughout the world, there is a concerted effort to reduce the amount of smoking, and in particular, advertising for smoking is banned in newspapers and electronic media, and in public places such as sport arenas where young people, the most susceptible group, may be influenced to start smoking. It

is ludicrous to propose, as the tobacco lobby still do in a final gasp at credulity, that advertising merely influences choice of brand and not whether to start smoking or not! It is disturbing to see that successive governments in Malta have not seen fit to ban advertising for smoking. We still see the Wild West advertising a brand of smoke as we put the first foot in our Airport, to ensure that all our visitors are aware of our lack of awareness about the dangers of smoking.

It is time to stop!

References:

¹Vol 5, Table 12, p415.

²See M. Cauchi, Löwenbräu Symposium, 1999.

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