

Smoking Prevention Intervention Among Secondary School Students in the Spanish Province of Malaga

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OBJECTIVE: To assess the prevalence of smoking among 13- to 18-year-old students, analyze smoking-related factors in this population, and design an intervention program to reduce smoking.

POPULATION AND METHODS: A 6-month smoking prevention intervention was designed for students at a public secondary school in the Spanish province of Malaga. The objective of the intervention was to inform students of the gravity of smoking and its deleterious effects on health. The efficacy of the intervention was subsequently assessed.

RESULTS: Of the 337 students who completed the questionnaire, 27% declared they were smokers. Smoking prevalence was significantly higher among girls (36.1%) than boys (18.1%) ($P < .001$) and progressively increased with age. Initiation occurred at 13 to 14 years of age. The most common reason for starting was to try something new (52.2% of students). The greatest risk factor in the family environment was having a smoking sibling.

After the program, 78% of smokers admitted that the intervention had not affected their smoking but had made them more aware of its detrimental effects, and 66.8% planned to quit in the future.

CONCLUSIONS: The study shows the high prevalence of smoking among adolescents, particularly among girls. It also shows that health education increases understanding of the problems related to smoking, causing changes of attitude with regard to whether they will smoke in the future.

Key words: Tobacco use. Student. Prevention.

Intervención sobre tabaquismo en estudiantes de enseñanza secundaria de la provincia de Málaga

OBJETIVO: Conocer el consumo de tabaco en jóvenes de entre 13 y 18 años, analizar los factores asociados con el tabaquismo en esta población y desarrollar un programa de intervención para reducir su consumo.

POBLACIÓN Y MÉTODOS: Se ha diseñado un programa de intervención sobre tabaquismo de 6 meses de duración, dirigido a estudiantes de Enseñanza Secundaria Obligatoria de un instituto de la provincia de Málaga, orientado a informarles sobre la magnitud del problema del tabaquismo y sus efectos patológicos. Posteriormente se ha evaluado la eficacia de dicha intervención.

RESULTADOS: De los 337 alumnos que cumplimentaron la encuesta, el 27% se declaraba fumador. El consumo era significativamente ($p < 0,001$) mayor en las mujeres (36,1%) que en los varones (18,1%) y se incrementaba de forma progresiva con la edad. La edad de comienzo se situaba entre los 13 y 14 años. El motivo más frecuente por el que iniciaban al consumo era probar algo nuevo (un 52,2% de los alumnos). En el entorno familiar el mayor factor de riesgo para el adolescente era tener un hermano fumador.

Una vez finalizado el programa, aunque el 78% reconocía que éste no había influido directamente sobre su consumo, tenía más conciencia de los efectos perjudiciales del tabaco y el 66,8% de los fumadores se planteaba dejarlo en el futuro.

CONCLUSIONES: El estudio pone de manifiesto el elevado consumo de tabaco en los adolescentes, fundamentalmente en las chicas. Además, demuestra que la educación sanitaria es útil para mejorar el conocimiento sobre el problema del tabaquismo, ya que provoca un cambio de actitud en los adolescentes fumadores respecto a su futuro consumo.

Palabras clave: Tabaquismo. Estudiantes. Prevención.

Introduction

In western countries, smoking is a major problem for public health, not only among adults but also among children and adolescents.¹ Despite scientific evidence

that smoking causes death and incurable illness, prevalence is increasing among the young as a consequence of aggressive advertising on the part of the tobacco industry which promotes its products among the new generations of potential smokers.²

According to the survey carried out for the Spanish national drug plan in 2000, tobacco is second to alcohol as the most used drug among secondary-school students, as shown by the fact that 34.4% have smoked on some occasion.³ Smoking is more prevalent among girls and

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the difference between the sexes increases with age. Age is clearly related to smoking, with prevalence increasing from 14 to 18 years of age. Adolescents are an easy target, a fact the tobacco industry well knows, and advertising campaigns are directed to this population. Over recent years cigarette advertising has been aimed at the young and, particularly, at women, who will soon equal men in smoking prevalence.⁴

Smoking at an early age is a risk factor for nicotine dependence at older ages. If an adolescent manages to avoid smoking, he or she is unlikely to smoke as an adult.⁵ Habits like smoking adopted at this stage of life are difficult to modify once established and are sustained in adulthood.⁶

Smoking prevention among the young must be tackled on 2 fronts: by limiting advertising as recommended in Spanish Royal Decree 192/1988 and by educating, through health education programs.⁷

Health education forms part of the general education children and adolescents should receive to encourage healthy lifestyles and to prevent nicotine or any other drug dependency.⁸ In Spain, the national drug plan has achieved the reduction of some drug use among adolescents but not of smoking.³ The inclusion of health education in the government regulation of the educative system (Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo) (LOGSE) has tried to introduce programs that have been successful in other countries.⁹⁻¹¹

The efficacy of smoking prevention programs in schools has been demonstrated by authors such as Barrueco et al,¹ de la Cruz Amorós et al,² and Ellickson et al¹²; interventions aimed at the young are widely regarded as more profitable than those that target other age groups.

The objective of this study was to discover the characteristics of smoking among the young in Spain and, at the same time, to try and design an informative program on the detrimental effects of smoking and the benefits of healthy lifestyles in order to reduce smoking prevalence in this population.

Population and Methods

A 6-month intervention program was carried out on secondary-school students at a public secondary school in Malaga, Spain, as well as an observational, transversal study with information collected on 2 occasions. The program was carried out during the 2002-2003 academic year and with the cooperation of the teachers of the school. Before starting the informative sessions, a questionnaire was distributed which consisted of 13 closed questions (similar to the European questionnaire on cancer prevention) and examined the following variables: sex, age, attitude to smoking, practice of sports, smoking habits of family, and awareness of the detrimental effects of smoking (Table 1). Students answered the questionnaire anonymously just before beginning the informative program on smoking.

The target population consisted of 647 teenagers, 13 to 18 years old, who were studying the second, third, fourth, and fifth year of secondary school education.

TABLE 1
Questionnaire Given to Students Before the Smoking
Intervention Program*

Age
Sex
Boy
Girl
Do you smoke?
Yes
No
Have you ever tried smoking?
Yes
No
What were your reasons for not continuing?
Concern for health
Practicing a sport
Smoking tastes bad
Smoking is absurd.
Because of your parents
For other reasons
If you are a smoker how often do you smoke?
Occasionally
At weekends
Every day
At what age did you start smoking?
What was the reason you started smoking:
Friends
To try something new
Adolescence
Other reasons
Does anyone in your family smoke?
Nobody
Father
Mother
Brother or sister
Do your friends smoke?
Yes
No
Do you practice a sport?
Yes
No
Do you know what diseases smoking causes?
Cancer
Bronchitis
Cardiovascular diseases
Others

*Translation of the original Spanish questionnaire, for information purposes.

The content of the intervention was designed to provide information on the magnitude of the problem of smoking and its pathological components and effects and to analyze the publicity of large tobacco companies. Sessions were given in an audiovisually equipped classroom with 50 students per session. Material was created specifically for the program, based on the smoking prevention program of the Spanish Society of Pulmonology and Thoracic Surgery (SEPAR), and consisted of slides, questionnaires, and transparencies. Informative posters were put up around the school with the reminder that smoking was forbidden.

When the sessions had finished, discussions were organized and moderated by the teachers to assess whether the students had found the intervention useful and students answered a further questionnaire to assess the efficacy of the sessions (Table 2).

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