

## CONNECTING WITH GUIDANCE COUNSELORS IN ANTI SMOKING CAMPAIGNS IN FORMAL EDUCATION

### ÖRGÜN EĞİTİMDEKİ SİGARA KARŞITI MÜCADELEDE REHBER ÖĞRETMENLERLE İŞBİRLİĞİ

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#### Özet

Sigara tüketimi ile mücadelenin en önemli ayaklarından biri toplumun tütün ürünleri konusunda eğitilmesi ve bilinçlendirilmesidir. Bu amaçla öğretmenlere önemli görevler düşmektedir. Bu çalışma ile rehber öğretmenlerin sigara içme oranları, sigaraya karşı tutumları, sigara ile ilişkili hastalıklar ve sigara içiminin kontrolünde yasal önlemler konusundaki düşüncelerinin değerlendirilmesi amaçlandı. Diyarbakır'da ki rehber öğretmenlere kendi kendilerine dolduracakları anket uygulandı. Çalışmaya 217 öğretmen (135 erkek, 82 kadın, ortalama yaş 29.2±4.5) alındı. Bunlardan 78(%35.9)'i sigara içmekteydi. Sigara fiyatlarının aşırı derecede artırılması, kahvehane, lokanta gibi eğlence mekânlarında, spor, kültür, sanat etkinliği yapılan açık hava toplantılarında yasaklanması dışındaki tüm yasal önlemlere %90'dan fazla destek vardı. Hemen tamamı sigaranın yeni doğan bebek ölümleri ve mesane kanseri yapıcı etkileri dışındaki sağlık zararlarını biliyordu. Rehber öğretmenlerle, sigaranın kısıtlanmasıyla ilgili yasal önlemlere yüksek düzeydeki destekleri ve sigaranın insan sağlığına olan zararları konusundaki bilgileri nedeni ile örgün eğitimdeki sigara karşıtı mücadelede aktif olarak işbirliği yapılabilir. (Anatol J Clin Investig 2009;3(4);203-207).

#### Abstract

One of the most important steps in the struggle against tobacco smoking is public training and awareness. For this purpose, teachers carry important responsibilities. This study is aimed to evaluate the rate of smoking, reactions against it, the knowledge about smoking-related disorders, and legal restrictions against smoking in guide teachers (guidance counselors). A self-administered questionnaire was applied to guide teachers in Diyarbakır. Totally 217 teachers (135 male, 82 female, mean age 29.2 ± 4.5 years) were included in this study. Seventy-eighth (35.9%) of them were found to be smokers. More than 90% of them showed supportive attitudes for all the legal preventions except for extremely high cigarette prices, prohibition of smoking in entertainment places such as cafes, restaurants and outdoor places in which various sports, cultural and art activities take place. Almost all of the participants were aware of the health damaging impacts of smoking except its neonatal death and bladder cancer-inducing effects. Owing to their high degree, support for legal restrictions and their knowledge regarding the damaging effects of cigarette smoking on human health, guiding counselors can be actively cooperated in anti-smoking campaigns in formal education. (Anatol J Clin Investig 2009;3(4);203-207).

#### Introduction

Tobacco use causes a death every six seconds, and one third or half of all smokers die due to smoking [1,2]. Unless urgent precautions are taken, it is reported that one billion people will die from the use of tobacco this century [3,4]. Despite all these negative effects, tobacco use is still very common all over the world. Low price, aggressive marketing strategies of the tobacco industry, lack of effective policies against tobacco use, being a high-degree addictive substance and lack of knowledge about the dangers of tobacco use can play a role in this situation [4, 5].

Previous studies have shown that most smokers begin smoking in adolescence, and the earlier a person uses tobacco, the more likely he or she

will become a regular smoker as an adult [4,6,7]. Furthermore, it has been reported that peers, parents and teachers can be effective role models with regard to the start of smoking in this young age group [8-12].

In Turkey, "the law concerning the prevention of tobacco products-related damages and control of tobacco derivatives", which was issued in 1996 and revised to a great extent in 2008, has become a very important step in the anti-smoking campaign. This law gives the Ministry of National Education the mission of preparing a curriculum to inform children and young people about the use of tobacco products and health risks of exposure to tobacco smoke. However,

formal education does not have an education program yet. At this point, teachers, as role models, have important responsibilities in educating the young people and helping them to acquire behavioral changes against smoking. Today, in our country, teachers who provide guidance and psychological counseling services create and keep personal development files, take responsibilities in future planning and help solve addiction and other compulsive behaviors of their students.

This study was performed in order to examine the guidance counselors' attitudes, knowledge and thoughts related to cigarette smoking and depending on the results to provide the necessary education in order to activate them in anti-smoking campaigns.

### Material and methods

In our country, Provincial Tobacco Control Boards were formed in order for legal regulations regarding tobacco control to be effective. Diyarbakir's (one of the biggest provinces in the southeast of Turkey) Provincial Tobacco Control Board decided to organize educational conferences for anti-smoking campaign, starting with guidance counselors in schools. Cooperating with the Provincial National Education Directorate of Diyarbakir, all of the guidance counselors in the city were gathered in an educational meeting. Before the meeting, after making necessary explanations, survey forms were distributed, which the participants were expected to fill out on their own. The survey consisted of questions aimed to determine the demographic characteristics, smoking habits, knowledge about tobacco-related diseases, and opinions on legal regulations related to the control of tobacco and tobacco-derivatives.

To determine the smoking status in the survey, the following definitions were followed: Ex-Smoker: a person who smoked for at least for 6 months in the past but was a non-smoker at the time of the survey; Smoker: a person who currently smoked at least 1 cigarette/day regularly; Non-smoker: a person who never smoked. In order to increase the objectivity of the answers, no questions related to their personal identification and the schools in which they were working were asked.

*Statistical analysis:* The survey data were evaluated by using the Chi-square test. The means were expressed as mean±standard deviation. A p value of <0.05 was considered to be statistically significant.

### Results

All of the guide counselor teachers from the province and the districts attended the meeting (n = 274), and all received the survey forms; however 225 of them completed and returned the survey. Eight questionnaires were not evaluated as they were incomplete. The remaining 217 surveys were included in the evaluation process.

One hundred and thirty-five of the participants (% 62.2) were male, and 82 (% 37.8) were female. The average age was  $29.2 \pm 4.5$  (22-49) years and 94 (% 43.3) of them were married. The ratio of participants that had experienced smoking at least once in their lives was 77.4% (n = 168); the ratio of participants that had smoked for at least 6 months in their lives was 57.4% (n = 125) and of these, 72% (n = 90) started smoking before 20 years of age. 35.9% (n = 78) of the participants were current smokers, and 80% of them were planning to quit smoking. The age of starting to smoke was  $18.9 \pm 3.9$  (7-31 years). There was no gender difference among smokers. 90.2% of the teachers indicated that smokers can quit smoking if they wanted to. The opinion of participant guide teachers on smoking has been shown in Table 1 and their answers regarding the legal regulations on tobacco use have been displayed in Table 2.

Participants claimed that smoking was associated with Lung cancer (98%), laryngeal cancer (98%), cardiovascular diseases (95%), chronic bronchitis (93%), oral cancer (91%), cerebro-vascular diseases (90%), neonatal death (77%), and bladder cancer (62%).

### Discussion

The World Health Organization (WHO) names smoking as a global tobacco epidemic, and requests that governments apply the preventive measures as emphasized in "Tobacco Control Framework Agreement and Global Tobacco Epidemic" without any loss of time [4.5]. The package of WHO, also known as MPOWER contains advices with proven efficiency on tobacco control. One of these recommendations is to provide education to the community about the harmful effects of tobacco. People should recognize tobacco as a substance that causes addiction and health problems, is socially unwanted and that has a negative social image.

In our study, the ratio of smokers among participant guide counselors was found to be 35.9%. This rate was similar in both sexes. According to the study "Public Research on Smoking Habits and the Campaign against Smoking" that was performed in Turkey, the percentage of smokers among the male

population of more than 15 years of age was 62.8%, that of the female population was 24.3%, and that of the entire population was found to be 43.6% [12]. In another study, 40.7% of high school teachers were reported to smoke regularly, and 17.4% were reported to smoke occasionally [13]. In the studies from different countries, the smoking prevalence among high school teachers was 37.2% in Spain, 33% in Romania, and 44.7% in Japan; these results are in accordance with the general prevalence of tobacco use in these countries[4,14,15,16]. We found no similar studies on cigarette smoking specifically performed on guidance counselors in the literature. In our study, the ratio of smokers among guidance counselors was in general lower than our country's mean and the mean value that was reported among teachers.

The entire working group accepted that smoking was harmful to health. The vast majority of participants already knew that smoking causes cancer of the lung, mouth, throat and cardiovascular diseases, but they were less informed regarding neonatal death, and especially bladder cancer. There was no difference among smokers and non-smokers with respect to their knowledge levels. The knowledge of guidance counselors on the harmful effects of smoking was similar to the ratios of previously reported studies [13]. Except for commonly expressed diseases, it was observed that the association and causal relationship of smoking with many other cancer and diseases were not adequately known.

Ninety percent of teachers agreed that most smokers could quit smoking if they wanted to. This situation can be associated with the fact that the addictive properties of tobacco are not adequately known or ignored. Yet today, smoking is considered as a disease, and nicotine is defined as a substance that causes both physical and psychological addiction [17].

There was an agreement between smoking and non-smoking teachers on legal restrictions that were issued on cigarette advertisement and presentations [13]. While the ratio of smoking teachers who claimed that smoking should be

banned among teachers in schools was 15.7% in the study performed by Danaci[13] and colleagues, this ratio was 93.3% in our study. This obvious difference between these two studies can be related to the change in the perspective during the time difference between the two studies or perceiving the restrictions as more natural causes. In our study, all of the guidance counselors including smokers were supportive on legal precautions, being a role model for students and prohibition of smoking. However, their support on legal precautions must be encouraged by behavioral changes.

All the teachers in our study agreed on the necessity that young people should be made conscious of smoking and its hazards on health. It is known that people most often start smoking in the adolescence period, and that the teachers' attitudes on this topic affect the young people [6,8,9,12,18]. According to a guide that was prepared to prevent tobacco use in USA schools, educational practices should start at 6th-8th grades [20]. The importance of teachers that hold classes and educational programs on the prevention of tobacco use have also been reported[19,21]. However, it is evident that without restricting these educational practices in schools, simultaneous implementation of other tobacco control policies such as bans on advertisement, increasing the prices, and prevention of passive exposure are also very important [4,22].

### Conclusions

The knowledge level of guidance counselors on cigarette and its effects on health, their sentiment and support on legal regulations are at satisfactory levels. It can be inferred that owing to their vocational training and having a lower prevalence of smoking than that of other teachers and the general population, they can play a role in the anti-smoking campaign, both as role models and as instructors.

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**Table 1.** Rates of guidance counselors that supported proposals on cigarette smoking

OPINIONS	Current Smokers	Nonsmoker	Ex-smoker	p
Smoking is the most important known cause of illness and death	84	89.5	85.1	0.56
Passive smoking is hazardous to health	92	96.6	93.5	0.3
Most of the smokers can quit smoking if they want to	85.5	93.4	91.5	0.2
Being next to a smoker is disturbing	77.3	96.7	93.6	<0.001
Teachers should become good examples to others as being non-smokers.	92.1	96.7	93.6	0.4
Young people should be made conscious of smoking and its hazards to health	100	100	100	

**Table 2.** Rates of guidance counselors that support the legal restrictions on the use of tobacco derivatives

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS	Current Smokers (%)	No-smoker (%)	Ex-smoker (%)	P
Prohibition of smoking in public service buildings	91.7	100	97.8	0.006
Prohibition of smoking in closed areas within educational institutions (schools, classrooms, nurseries)	93.3	100	100	0.005
Prohibition of smoking in all kinds of cultural, art, sports activities that are performed outdoors and in closed vicinity to these places	55.4	74.7	57.8	0.02
Prohibition of smoking in coffee shops, pubs and cafes	55.6	78.9	78.3	0.002
Banning of cigarette advertisements	93.3	96.7	95.7	0.8
Increasing the prices of cigarettes to extremely high rates.	54.2	71.9	62.2	0.07
Not selling cigarettes to people younger than 18 years of age	97.3	96.7	100	0.27
Placing health warning signs on cigarette packs	93	88.8	87.2	0.5
No smoking of cigarettes on television, movies and advertisements and no broadcasting of the picture of cigarettes	89.2	95.6	87.2	0.16
Punishing people that throw empty cigarette packs, cigarette butts, papers and any other related items into the environment	97.3	93.4	93.5	0.43
Punishing people that do not comply with the restrictions	91.8	95.6	93.6	0.6

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