

## **SMOKE-FREE HOMES PROGRAMME: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Introduction**

Childhood exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) is associated with serious health problems. Despite the recognised severity of childhood exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), several studies show high prevalence of exposed children in the world and also in Portugal. In order to protect children of this serious health hazard an ETS type preventive programme, “Smoke free-homes”, was developed and tested in Portugal. Its main purpose is to increase the number of parents who do not smoke and / or to reinforce the norm of not allowing smoking at home and in the car, enabling “participant students” to proactively promote parents’ behaviour change and effectively reduce or avoid ETS home exposure. This is a school based programme, to be applied in the classroom by teachers.

#### **Objectives**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the "Smoke-free homes" programme, directed to 4<sup>th</sup> grade children and their parents or carers, aiming to reduce their exposure to ETS at home and in the family car.

#### **Methodology**

This is a pre-test and post-test study with 795 students belonging to 32 schools of the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of basic education, at the Braga council. A self-administered and structured questionnaire was applied to 795 students at school year 2007/08, in the context of the classroom, before and after the intervention. To analyze the data, chi-square was used for the categorical variables.

#### **Results**

The prevalence of children exposed to daily or occasional ETS (at least one of co-inhabitants smokes at home), dropped from 42.2% in the pre-test to 32.6% in the post-test ( $p = 0.001$ ).

#### **Conclusion**

Based on the data, we can conclude that the programme “Smoke-free homes” was effective in reducing the tobacco smoke of parents and other co-inhabitants at home, and therefore helped to reduce the prevalence of children exposed to ETS in

about 10%. However, it appears that there is still about a third of children exposed, which highlights the need for more interventions in this area.

Thereby trying to discover the reality of Portuguese children's exposure to ETS and understand the determinants of smoking by fathers and mothers at home, a project entitled "Prevention of children's exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) at home", is ongoing, funded by the FCT (Foundation for Science and Technology).

The tasks of this project include a study involving the gathering of qualitative and quantitative data of parents, to get a better knowledge of the motives which lead them to smoke inside their home. Based on the knowledge of the determinants of such behavior, the program "Smoke Free Homes" will be updated and then evaluated once more, using an experimental design with experimental and control groups.

**Keywords:** Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS); Smoking prevention; Health Education.