INTRODUCTION
Tobacco epidemic is one of the most serious public health threats the world has ever faced. Tobacco use kills more than 7 million people annually and it is estimated that this number will increase to 10 million by the year 2020. [1] Teachers play a key role in students’ attitudes and behavior towards smoking as they interact daily with students during critical years of physical and psychological development. Not surprisingly, the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which represents the world’s first public health treaty, makes special mention for educators in Article 12 thus recognizing that they represent an influential group for tobacco control. [2]

AIM
We aimed to investigate characteristics and attitudes towards tobacco smoking for the population of educators in Greece.

METHODS
A cross-sectional study was designed to collect epidemiological data about tobacco use for the population of educators in Greece. Sampling methodology was based on a two stage stratified clustered design with schools as the primary sampling and classes as the secondary units. Collection of data derived from a representative sample of public and private secondary education schools of the two biggest cities of Greece for the 2014-2015 school year. An electronic questionnaire was created to collect data regarding tobacco use, nicotine dependence, quitting history, intention to quit and characteristics and knowledge regarding smoking and attitudes towards tobacco free policies. An online registration system was prepared to receive questionnaires after completion. Trained researchers visited selected schools to inform teachers and invite them to participate. One thousand thirty two teachers (424 males, 608 females) enrolled in the study. The Greek Ministry of Education supported and approved our study. [3] The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the statistical analyses.

RESULTS
Current smoking was reported by 25.6% of the respondents and daily smoking was reported by 24.4% of smokers. Moreover, 13.6% reported smoking during the first 60 minutes after awakening. 2.7% reported difficulty refraining from smoking in places it was forbidden and 5.6% reported smoking even if sick and in bed most of the day. A total of 24.0% reported successful smoking cessation and 15.5% reported unsuccessful quit attempts. Of those who reported smoking, 20.6% expressed health concerns, 18.1% reported intention to quit and 9.5% stated they would consult a physician or a smoking cessation clinic. The majority (98.4%) classified nicotine as an addictive substance, yet a smaller proportion of the respondents (66.2%) compared the addictive effect of nicotine to that of heroin and cocaine. A large proportion (69.1%) reported smoking prevention activity in the past. The majority agreed with the development of smoking prevention activities among students (98.5%) and the implementation of a school-based smoking prevention program (94.9%) and expressed intention to actively participate (81.8%).

CONCLUSIONS
Greek teachers display a lower smoking rate as compared to the general adult Greek population and a similar smoking rate to the general adult European population. A considerable percentage of smoking cessation rate is reported and a similar rate expressed the intention to quit, yet teachers are presented as unwilling to ask for professional help to quit smoking. It is necessary to provide this population with efficient cessation support. Targeted educative interventions are needed to improve teachers’ knowledge on the physiological effects of nicotine. Public health efforts must build on the overwhelming majority of Greek teachers who are willing to participate in smoking prevention activities.

References