

Tobacco control law compliance in the Greek school grounds and attitudes of school teachers towards prevention of smoking and tobacco control policies

Liozidou A.^{1,2}, Fragkoulakis M.³, Teloniatis S.⁴, Tzortzi A.^{4,5}, Evangelopoulou V.⁴, Behrakis P.^{4,5,6}

¹ National School of Public Health, ² Faculty of Human Sciences, Athens Metropolitan College, Department of Statistics, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, ⁴ George D. Behrakis Research Lab, Hellenic Cancer Society, ⁵ Institute of Public Health, The American College of Greece ⁶ Biomedical Research Foundation of Athens Academy

INTRODUCTION

Regulation of tobacco has been characterized as one of the most controversial public health policy topics at all levels of government. In terms of regulation and implementation of tobacco control measures, the big challenge is how to regulate a product that is lethal, but legal for most people over the age of eighteen. This issue has occupied governments and experts worldwide and a lot of ink has been spilled in the research arena as to whether there are limits to the imposition of measures in the name of public health. [1]

Recent evidence [2] provides robust support that introduction of legislative smoking ban improves health outcomes for countries and their population through reduction of second hand smoke exposure, namely, the reduction of hospital admissions and the reduction of mortality from smoking related diseases.

Greece has introduced a smoking ban in public health places, including schools, kindergartens, nurseries and playgrounds in 2002-2003, yet poorly enforced.

AIM

We aimed to investigate compliance with tobacco control legislation in the Greek schools, as well as teachers' attitudes towards prevention of smoking and tobacco control policies.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Data were collected as part of a cross-sectional study [3] on the epidemiology of tobacco use and related factors for the population of Greek educators. Sampling methodology was based on a two stage stratified clustered design with schools as the primary sampling and classes as the secondary units. Twenty six public and private secondary education schools of the two biggest cities of Greece for the 2014-2015 school year were selected. An electronic questionnaire included questions regarding tobacco control law compliance in the school premises, attitudes towards smoking and tobacco free policies. All participants were invited to register online and complete a questionnaire. One thousand thirty two teachers (424 males, 608 females) enrolled in the study. The Greek Ministry of Education supported and approved our survey (protocol approval No. 63377/G2/24-04-2014).

Frequencies and relative frequencies were calculated for all the questions. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the statistical analyses.

RESULTS

A large proportion of teachers (63.8%) reported that smoking is allowed in their school. Of those teachers who smoke, 19.9% reported smoking in the school premises (16.6% in outdoor school grounds, 2.4% in the staff room and 0.9% in other indoor school premises i.e. classrooms, hallways, labs). No disciplinary measures were reported for those teachers who smoke in the school premises, except for a percentage of 1.6% who recalled receiving a reprimand from the school principal. Over half of the respondents (52.4%) reported that their students smoke in the school premises. The majority of teachers (98.4%) stated they would take certain measures to prevent students from smoking, while a percentage of 17.9% think they serve as health models for their students. The majority of teachers (92.1%) agreed with the enforcement of legislation to protect against passive smoking in indoor public places, as well as with the enforcement of smoking bans in open public venues (82.5%).

Moreover, most of the teachers (89.2%) believe that Greece should set the reduction of smoking prevalence as a national goal.

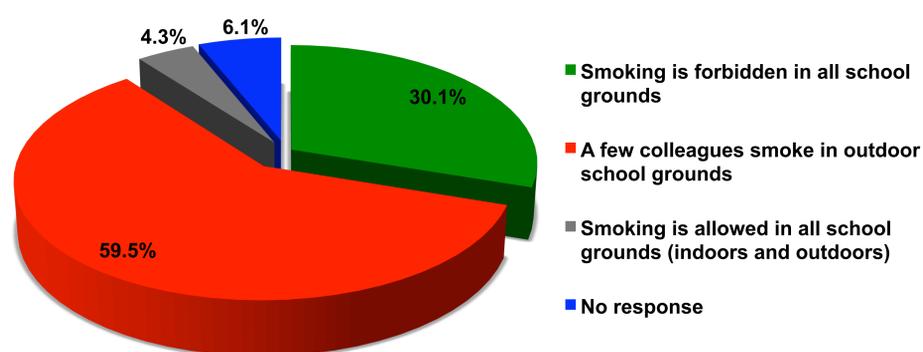


Figure 1. Pie chart representing the situation as to smoking as reported by the sample of the Greek school teachers.

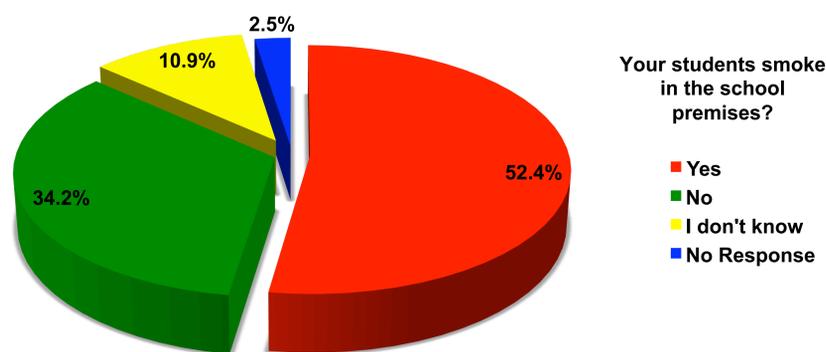


Figure 2. Pie chart representing the rate of smoking in the school premises for students as reported by the sample of the Greek teachers.

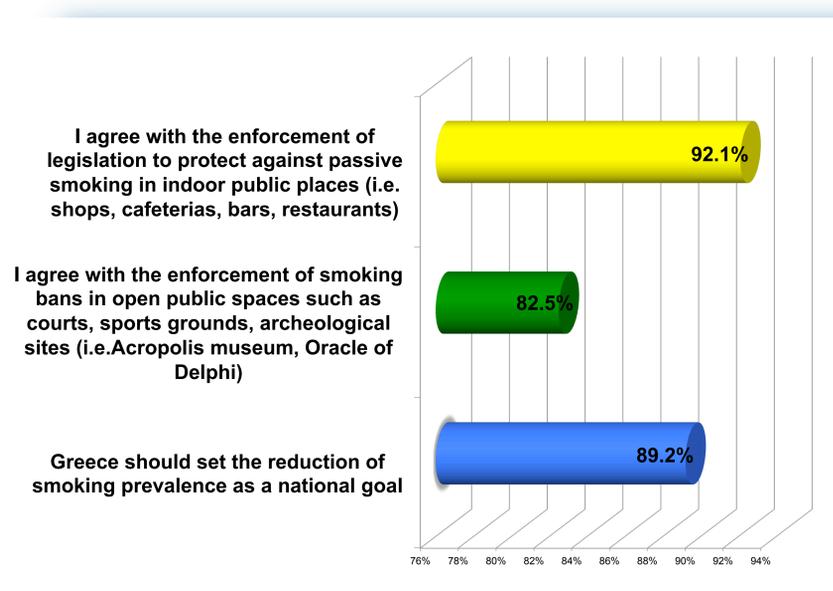


Figure 3. Bar chart representing attitudes of Greek teachers towards smoke free policies for the country of Greece.

CONCLUSIONS

A large proportion of Greek teachers report that tobacco control law in the school grounds is violated, both from teachers and students thus render smoke-free school environment in Greece a challenge. Nevertheless, educators maintain a significantly positive attitude towards the enforcement of smoking ban. It is an imperative that the competent bodies to take immediate action against the circumvention of the law on smoking ban and restore a healthy school environment for the physical health and psychological wellbeing of Greek youth and school staff.

References

- [1] Jacobson PD, Wasserman J, Anderson JR. Historical overview of tobacco legislation and regulation. *Journal of Social Issues*. 1997 Apr 1;53(1):75-95.
- [2] Frazer K, Callinan JE, McHugh J, van Baarsel S, Clarke A, Doherty K, Kelleher C. Legislative smoking bans for reducing harms from secondhand smoke exposure, smoking prevalence and tobacco consumption. *The Cochrane Library*. 2016 Jan 1