

Smoking and parental communication

Lidra Ballhysa

*Msc, European Public Health
Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences
Maastricht University, Netherlands*

Absrtact Based on the polls organized it results that the habit of smoking is considered as the smallest problem compared to the other ones that their child might have. Comparing this problem with others issues like: attendance and school results, drugs and sex, smoking is considered as the last "concern" of the parents and families in general. That is because this habit is considered as a health problem of the individual who smokes. But the facts show that it is not like this. Smoking is not only an individual health problem. On the other hand with all the great work done, continuous campaigns, fines and laws to ban smoking, youngsters and teenagers who smoke are increasing every day. In order to win this "war" (that smoking should not be started or re-started) from children and teenagers it is necessary the help of the parent, family, but changed as a behavior. The parent and the family can be promoting and cooperating factors with the individual that the decision to start or ban smoking can be decided with them. A careful parent does not only tell off or takes reprimanding measures but above all becomes a friend to overcome such a danger. A well informed parent on the way how to behave with his/her own child is a successful path to fight the habit of smoking. The work done with parents by the school or different NGOs which are closely related to families would bring and give more results than fussy and costly campaigns.

Key words: Smoking, individual and social damage, parental behavior, information, work with teenagers.

Reflection over smoking habit and also over the fact that this is not something new for Albanian, we should emphasize that Albania is ranked as one of the countries that register the highest number of people who smokes. After all, more disturbing remains the fact that teenagers are considering smoking as being something fashionable. In the same time, statistics declared that even the number of women who smokes, is becoming higher and higher every day. (ABC News 2011),

According to the research of the APhi (Albanian Public Health Institution) in Tirana, result that 50% of canvassed citizens, admitted that they have at least smoked once in their live. Inside the group of people who smokes, results that 60% are males and 18% are females. (Shekulli 2011) So the ration is 1/3.

In the research which is done in 60 secondary and high schools in Albania,(*Shëndeti në Shqipëri*" 2004) it is noticed the fact that the number of smoking people is growing very fast, unfortunately, they start it in a very young age. On the other hand, disturbing is even the fact that a high number of pupils involved on canvass, admit that they will start smoking next year.

Being focused on the 13-15 age group (7, 8, 9, 10 grades) it results that 16.8% of pupils regularly smoked. After the same survey, divided in genders, boys were those who smoked most. Thus nearly 21.9 % of the boys in the secondary and high schools in our country, smoke cigarettes. While the girls, even though fewer in number compared to boys, unfortunately occupy a considerable percentage: 12.5% (13-15 age groups) Here seems that the males-females smoker report has changed; this report results in 2/1 now. This shows that the tendency of the minors to smoke is stronger than that of adult females.

Without wanting to stop on the numerous damages that this habit causes in our society, which is characterized for an average age relatively young, summing up we should say that:

- In Albania are counted about 3300 deaths per year as a result of smoking.
- In 10 people with lung cancer, 9 of them are smokers. (Shekulli)
- In the previous list about diseases caused by smoking like: lung, esophagus, larynx, throat cancer; chronic pulmonary diseases, cardiovascular and damages in the reproductive system, now should be added diseases like: cataract, pneumonia, lung and pancreas cancer etc.

But in this habit the damage is in several ways., " the poisoning" is not only individual. We must encounter others too, so them who absorb nicotine and tar unintentionally., passive smokers, that get killed every day from the environment which is oversupplied with smoke in bars and other public environments, in the house, even in hospitals and places that need to keep the flag of war against smoking. From the recent data of a study (*Shëndeti ...*)it comes out that the future

doctors, the students of medicine, are also exposed towards smoking: 4 to 10 students smoke. About 65,1% of the male students in these branches, smoke cigarettes from years, whereas females 35,7%.

To continue with the completion of the picture on smoking and the damage that it brings not only to the individual, but for a whole society, the fact that needs to be outlined is that albanians are the second in Balkan, after Turkey, for the percent of the smokers (*Shëndeti ...*) they spend nearly 300 milion dollars in a year; for cigarettes only, the albanians spend approximately 850 thousands dollars within a day.

According to specialists, smoking is one of the biggest challenges of public health, which the world is facing today, undoubtedly our country too. Data shows that there are 1,3 milliard smokers all over the world, while 5 million people die every year from smoking. "If the phenomenon continues with these rates, then the number of deaths will reach 10 million in 2020, 70% of which will belong to developed countries", was emphasized in the conference ...

If we attentively observe and analyse the data on the spread of this habit in the albanian society, we come to these conclusions:

1. Most smokers are adolescents, the tendency to start it in a younger age (5-9 class) of undergraduate school.
2. Smokers, students of the faculty of medicine, say they have started smoking before going to college, in a very young age of adolescence.
3. Female smokers are growing in number, mainly in a young age. From recent surveys we see that the females who start smoking in a young age are in a ½ report with the males of their same age. On the contrary, females who start smoking at a young age or in a grown up stage are in a 1/3 report with the males of their same age.

The change of parental role

Based on these results we think only a strong law "against tobacco" is not enough. "In conclusion...some links of this act don't function well", also is still far away from being realized victory against this social habit.

Being introduced in the mechanism and session initiation, on ways of modes of spread of this social disease, we are in thought the first battle of this long war and costly starting in early age and in inside of the family. If we analyze in detail situation when a child starts smoking we will notice that are friends, is the social environment and family those who infects the first this "virus".

What should be done? Should we change tactic?

Yes. This is simple answer and, from the another side, is more effective as a way. Until child, teenager, they started pushes by social circle and familiar, then all "fighters" against this habit should behave as friends, as host and not as ordained and commanded. Commanders and Orderers are tested that have failed and continue to fail day by day.

A good friend help you to win this battle. But where can we find those good friends? One like this, a good friend, must be and could be the parent itself. He/She must behave with his child like a friend that pushes, invites to try smoking. He must be more closer with the age problems and with difficulties that his child faces everyday. A teenager who grows up day after day and to whom the world seems to be smaller and "enemy", condescending and restrictive, must be helped that this world to not be like this in his eyes and his mind. This world has also a place for him like an individ and with a special personality.

It is here that we encounter not so little difficulties for a parent, parents. (*Teen Smoking Statistics*) The majority of them don't know and can not enter in the role of a friend, even for a "rude", "rebelled", person to whom a child has chosen like a "hero" of his life. And this hero who has a manly voice, has not only a muscular body but he behaves like a real man: he challenges the school and society rules, he broke those rules that limited and controlled him when he was young, he could smoke. Even he smokes one a packet a day, and for this he shows of and seems more

He even smokes a packet of cigarettes a day boasting so he can look older in front of others who still stay in their "mamma's orders". Smoking is considered by the teenagers as one of the ways to change their personal image in front of the others. Do parents know how to behave with their children in this case?

Except this, the facts talk about another huge difficulty: In Albania more than 50% of the kids who smoke have at least one parent who smokes. Does this parent gives a positive example?

Can the battle against smoking be won, when another "enemy" appears, the smoking parent?

Yes, the answer is yes. This parent could be turned in an ally, into a comrade against smoking, because he feels everyday the consequences of a deadly habit. The parent is turned into a good and true friend which has been taught and trained about the behaviour of the teenagers who are in front of the dilemma to smoke or not to smoke.

The parent has the same role of the normal parent, but acts and stays near as a friend. What does he do when he understand that his child is giving signs to have started smoking? Does he put stronger rules who forbid smoking? Does

he close the teenager inside the house because he broke the rules and did not listen to his parent's word ? Does he hide all the cigarettes and ashtrays that are in the house ? Does he forbid his child to spend time with his smoking friend ? All these questions are methods which have been tested and failed in their function with the teenager who follows his friend's example to start smoking .

There exists a better , softer , and understandable way. The parent acting as a friend will try to help the child to get over this "problem": He pushes the teenager that his decision to start smoking (or to quit it , if he already started) to take it together with him as a friend who just wants the best for him and has more information than all the other friends when it comes to smoking . This parent friend gives him a kind of informations which he has never heard before . After this there is no order, but there is a mutual decision , just like good friends do .

The parent, teenager and smoking

Judging and thinking as a teenager the parents should know that, in this age their children care more about their near future than their far away one. He doesn't care what will happen after 20 years of smoking, neither for the diseases that it causes, for example. (Lung's cancer). He cares more about the meeting hour that he has the next day, about the exam that is coming, about the match and for the bet that he put for it.

Studies that are made in this field show that, speaking to the teenagers with details about the numerous diseases and sufferings that the smoking will cause in a faraway future, is useless. (Dulaj, M & Oda, B. 2003). The best way, to oblige teenagers and youths to stop smoking or to not start smoking is to discuss with them topics that they are sensitive of, for example physical appearance, the activity (the growth of) physic and self esteem too. You could mention to them information (without being seen as obligations) that:

Smoking give bad breath, it causes the yellowness of the teeth, the body and hair have a smell which the others don't like. It leaves nicotine strings in the finger, liquefy the lips and phlegm etc.

The body receive carcinogens some minutes after smoking, the heart beat grows, blood pressure rouse the carbon dioxide makes your eyes burn. This is no the appropriate way to treat your body that is like a seedling that could die away quickly.

A good health is the most precious thing for teenagers. Un-doubtfully, those who do not smoke, have a better health. They have more resistance, do exercises, have appetite, sleep well, and do not get fat and do not become lazy like the most of smokers. You can see athletes, they do not smoke and they are very healthy. They are always young and not just some men with a fading skin and a fading mind.

Talking to teenagers about smoking

Like everybody else, a teenage reacts in different manners toward the pressure of smoking. The parent knows his child more than anybody else. Important is the fact, that he and his child should be concerned about this abnormal situation. The parent should find the best way to tell his child how much he cares about him. The health of his child is the life itself; it is the principal motive that he works. Without his child being healthy, the life of the parent is pointless. That is why the parent should be pre- prepared, gathering data and materials that he would need in that discussion.

Below there is a list of suggestions, but the way of behavior should be selected by the parent himself.

-if you notice that your child stays a long time in front of the mirror, use this opportunity to talk to him about his concern about his physical appearance. Ask him how it would be for his friends to have a meeting with somebody whose mouth smells bad, or whose hair has a grouse smell... and other things that we have mentioned above.

-If one of your children that smoke is eating with appetite or is making exercises, use this opportunity to talk to him about the importance of health, because that is his concern. Remind him that food and sport do not prevent the damages that smoking causes. The entire contrary, smoking has a bad influence in sport and food. Remind him that the smoke of tobacco is the same with the smoke that cars throw in the air, which goes in our lungs and cause cancer.

Tenagers want to be independent. Use this to convince that what makes him valuable is his personality and respect that he has for him self. It is not the involvement in the crowd of smokers. If you smoke you do not gain the respect of your friends. -"All people smoke", stop treating me like a child. I am enough grown up to decide for my self. "Yes, it relaxes me". The parent should be prepare for these answers. He should not be bored, but he should be more careful, by giving similar examples for each case. Ex. It is not true that all of us smoke. 90.5 % smokers decide to banish it, but it is difficult enough. So it is better not to start smoking that trying in vain to stop it when your health is in danger.

- Suggest your child to talk with an adult who smokes, whether being a relative or a friend whose advice is important for him. He respect him. Encourage him to ask: if you had the possibility, would you start smoking

again ? The majority of smokers accept that it is a huge mistake in life when they had start smoking. Ah if we had possibility to banish from it!

Parents who smoke

Parents , brothers and sisters are an important example for teenagers . If those closer persons would smoke this would be a signal that smoking is not any bad or prohibited thing . In this case it would be better the opposite example : to banish smoking . This is very difficult , but a parent for his child does impossible things . Let consider this act like a sacrifice for the child and his health . The child who sees his/her parent smoking, is 58 time more predisposed to start smoking , compared with children who have not smoking parents . In this case the word is not important , but the example . A parent must be opened and very sincere with the child related with smoking , not only with its damages , but even for the time and causes that led in this habit . A parent also should show what difficulties has , how is his fisical condition now , breathing and throat , voice and lungs . He should accept honestly that when he had started smoking he didn't thought about those things that he feels today . If in that time was difficult to face the presure that was done from the society to start smoking , now is more difficult to banish it . He/She has tried some times , but he/she has started it again . Every time he/she had banished ,even for a short period , had added weight and every time he/she had restarted it , had lost weight . Conclusion : Smoking damage health , don't start smoking .

Related also with tobacco

Parent should be always in uninterrupted communication with children. The place that he will leave empty, would fill someone else. that, however, not as a parent. Teenager needs for support. Exactly this support that be realized thought continuous communication is an opportunity and a road for understand what child thinks and feels, what they want and what miss him, what aims and prevents to achieve the purpose.

Even communicatind for everyday things you leave them to understand and his opinion is important in family. He is someone that has his value and his place and not necessity to make a kind "heroism"(to smoke) to respected by others.

Parent to make care and to shown trunback, aggressive or criticaster always depreciatory. Childs feelings should be respected also his action in case is not to be approved.

Sanctimonious the dried and stale examples annoying teenagers he does not need and tolerated such as phrases: when I was as you....".we have done many things for you so....".what are going to say neighbors? Why you not acts like someone..Etc. Rather friendly sentences unsurface and will full sense are more effective and with advantageous:" I am really worried for you..." I feel sorry and I don't know how to help..."I am in trouble I can't slip thinking about your health

Everyone likes to be boasted .Thats the way to act with a teenager , but be careful not to exaggerate because you can lose authority very quickly .

The conversation should never end nervously and with insulting words . Even why the first battle seems lost there will be a second and third chance .There should always be an open path to make a conversation and not argue . The parents who know and follow these principles have won the battle not just once but twice : They have won a healthy child and a friend for life

Trying not to get too long and stick to the main point we can just mention that all these can be learned through different ways : through a medical literature , through preventive campaigns but most important of all through school . The school and the parent can crate a unity which is capable of confronting more education challenges in a contemporary society which moves so fast and has no time to see who falls and can not stand up without the help of the community. Life is short, and you can live it just once .Life can be more beautiful and longer when you live it physically and spiritually healthy.

Reference

ABC News, 18 Jan 2011

Dulaj, M & Oda, B. "Duhani një vesë me pasoja për jetën", Universitas 3, Tetovë 2003

- Shekulli, 31 maj 2011

" Shëndeti në Shqipëri" Raport i ISHP-se mbi indikatorët kryesorë të shëndetit dhe faktorë të tjerë që ndikojnë mbi ta. Tiranë 2004, f.185

- www.teenhelp.com/teen-health/teen-smoking-statistics.html