

# ASSESSING SMOKING HABITS OF THE STAFF IN FOSTER CARE HOMES IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM OF FIVE TRANSYLVANIAN COUNTIES

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**Keywords:** smoking habits, family and residential foster care homes, employees of protection system, smoking cessation

**Abstract:** The parental behaviour plays an important and independent role in the tobacco dependence trajectory and should be a focus of future interventions. The aims of the study was to assess the prevalence of tobacco smoking, the knowledge about harmful effects of smoking, to evaluate the interest to quit smoking among employees in a cluster of Romanian child protection residential facilities. In the present study we included 674 adults employed in family foster homes. Analyzing the answers to questions regarding smoking habits in present, 140 (20.8%) employees smoke every day, and 54 (8%) smoke occasionally. 53.1% of them would be interested to receive training in smoking prevention, therapy or counselling methods. While half of the respondents have never participated in a specific training to learn about the dangers of smoking, a large part of them would be interested in receiving such training, which justify the need and importance of research on smoking, widening cessation and prevention activities.

## INTRODUCTION

Tobacco use is one of the greatest threats to public health the world has ever faced and the most preventable cause of death in the world. Tobacco consumption globally kills nearly six million people a year as a consequence of active smoking and the deadly effects of second-hand smoke. More than 70% of the victims reside in low and middle income countries.(1) Increasing interest in, demand for, and use of proven tobacco-cessation products and services represents an extraordinary opportunity to reduce adult tobacco use.(2)

A previously published study conducted in family care homes in Harghita and Covasna counties has shown that more than half of the children had tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs in both counties.(3) The foster parental behaviour was associated with the respondents smoking behaviour, but in distinct ways. Foster father smoking behaviour was associated with increased odds of experimentation, the foster mother smoking behaviour was associated with current use. These results suggest that parental behaviour plays an important and independent role in the tobacco dependence trajectory and should be a focus of future interventions.(4)

An important aspect is the need to train teachers on these issues, and provide specific teaching and learning material on this topics.(5)

## PURPOSE

The aim of the study was to assess the prevalence of smoking, the knowledge about the harmful effects of tobacco, to evaluate the interest to quit smoking among employees in Romanian child protection residential facilities.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was designed as a cross-sectional study. The sample included 674 adults employed as foster care parents (father and mother) and educational instructors in 153

residential services. They are responsible for the children's care and education and these services provide accommodation to children who are temporarily or permanently deprived of parental care and who are in a risk situation. Trained data collectors conducted in-person surveys in 2014- 2015, in foster care homes of five counties (Mureş= 42, Alba=43, Harghita=38, Covasna=25, Sibiu=5).

The anonymous questionnaire contained 30 questions with single or multiple answers related to: socio-demographic factors (age, sex, occupation): attitude about smoking and smoking behaviour; knowledge related to smoking, information received on the harmful effects of smoking, cessation plans. Life prevalence of smoking was a binary variable and the cut-off value of cigarettes smoked ever was five packages. Smoking habits of foster parents were classified in four categories: non-smoker, smoking occasionally in a month, smoking occasionally in a week, and regular smoker.

Our research, as a part of a trilateral collaboration of American, Romanian and Hungarian scientists in Building Capacity for Tobacco Research in Romania project, was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Tîrgu-Mureş, Romania (Ref. Nr.: 19/29. 05. 2012). During the data sampling there were always respected the principles of anonymity and confidentiality.

The Statistical Package Program for Social Sciences IBM-SPSS for Windows (version 22.0.) was used for statistical analyses. Significant differences in the mean or median between groups were analysed using the t-test at a statistical level of  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

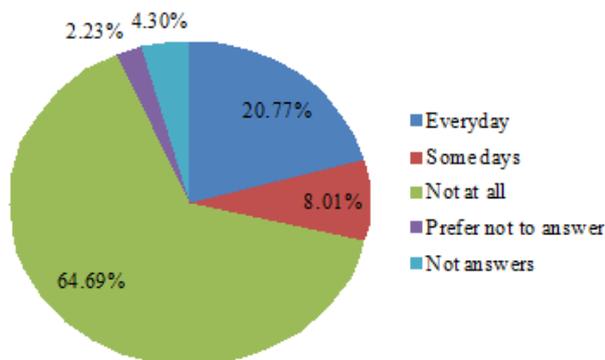
In the present study we included 674 adults employed in family foster homes, 179 employees were from Alba, 83 from Covasna, 190 from Harghita, 85 from Mureş and 137 from Sibiu county. The response rate was 98.53%. The final group

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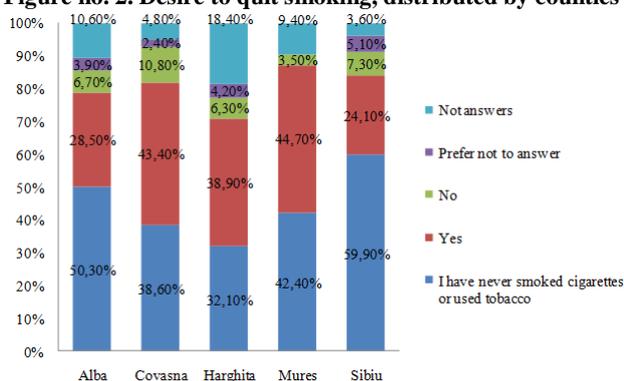
contained significantly ( $p = 0.001$ ) more women 524 (77.7%) than men 150 (22.3%). Almost half of the respondents, 288 (42.77%) were aged between 40-49 years, 173 (25.7%) 50-59 years, 131 (19.4%) 30-39 years and a smaller percentage 61 (9.1%) between 20-29 years. Out of the total, 171 respondents (25.4%) had smoked less than 100 cigarettes, and 179 (26.6%) had smoked cigarettes more than 100 to date. Analyzing the answers to questions regarding smoking habits in the present, more than half (436; 64.69%) of employees had reported that currently they don't smoke, 140 (20.8%) smoke every day, and 54 (8%) smoke occasionally. 6.5% did not answer the question (figure no. 1).

Figure no. 1. Smoking habits of employees



As far as quitting smoking, 232 (34.4%) of employees had tried to quit smoking. 61 (10.1%) of all of the respondents related that they are going to quit smoking sometime in the future, 47 (7%) in the next 6 months, and 35 (5.2%) in the next 30 days. Analysing the data by the residency of the respondents, we found significant differences ( $p < 0,001$ ): 44.7% from Mureş county prefer to quit, 43.4% from Covasna, 38,9% from Harghita, 28,5% from Alba, 24,1% from Sibiu (figure no. 2).

Figure no. 2. Desire to quit smoking, distributed by counties



Employees were asked if they had ever participated in an official training or health education about smoking prevention, therapies and counselling methods. 334 (49.6%) of employees from the five counties responded that they never participated, 94 (13.9%) did not remember or did not know, and 246 (36.5%) reported having participated in such training. 358 people of the total group surveyed (53.1%) were interested to participate in a course offered by an official or expert in smoking prevention, therapy or counselling methods, 209 (31%) reported that they were not interested in this subject, and 108 (15.9%) did not know if they were interested in such training. The highest interest was observed in Mureş county (figure no. 3).

Indoor smoking toleration is an important indicator of

tobacco use attitudes. In over a quarter of cases smoking was tolerated inside the house: 120 (17,8%) related daily smoking, 7% more rarely (figure no. 4).

Figure no. 3. Interest of formal training or clinician education on tobacco prevention

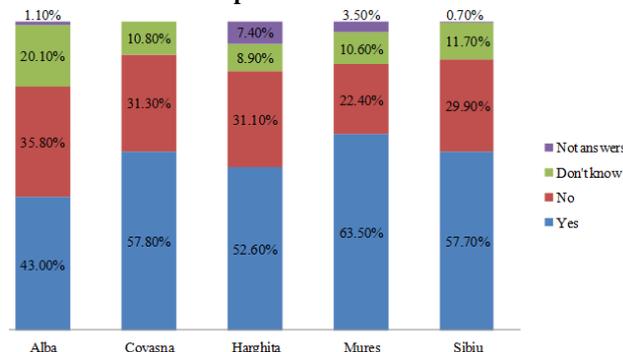
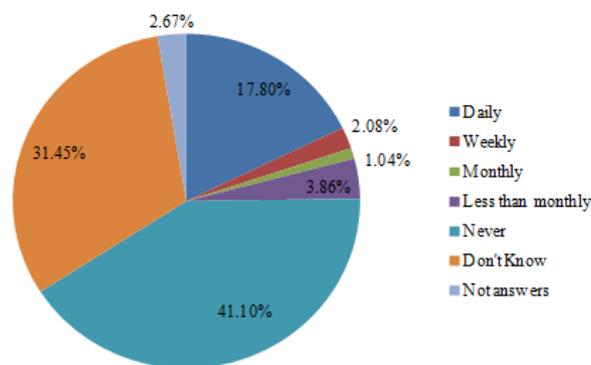


Figure no. 4. Smoking frequency inside the foster care homes



DISCUSSIONS

Our study shows that almost half of employees have never smoked so far, a percentage of 51.9% of the total surveyed employees had smoked at least once or are smokers, of which 25.4% had smoked less than 5 packets (100 cigarettes), and 26.6% were smoking more than 5 packs of cigarettes (100 cigarettes) so far.

Studies have shown that exposure to environmental smoke is high in Central and Eastern Europe including Romania.(6) According to data from the European Commission (7) regarding tobacco use in EU countries shows that almost a third of citizens are smokers (29%), nearly half claim that had never smoked, while the rest (21%) had quit smoking. The prevalence is highest in the countries of Southern Europe, particularly in Greece (40%), followed by Bulgaria (39%), Hungary (38%), Turkey (37%). In contrast, in Nordic Member States the proportion of smokers is the lowest, in Finland (21%) and in Sweden (16%).(8,9)

Proportions of ex-smokers in the European Union is very variable, between 12-31%, the EU27 average is 21%. The highest percentages are in the Netherlands (31%), Denmark (31%), Sweden (30%), the lowest percentages are: Romania (12%), Italy (13%), Cyprus (14%).(10)

In our study 10.1% of people surveyed declared the intention to quit smoking, but not in the next 6 months, 7% in the next 6 months, 5.2% in the next 30 days. 49.6% of employees from the five counties answered that they never participated, 13.9% did not remember, and 36.5% reported that had participated in training course or health education, in

smoking prevention programs, therapies and methods counselling. Of the total group surveyed more than half would be interested in a official training course taught by an specialist in smoking prevention.

The data suggest the importance of organizing smoking prevention and interventions programs for cessation among children and adults in social services. Educational intervention should be implemented to decrease adverse health effects of the exposure to second-hand smoke.

There were analyzed the used methods at smokers who have tried to stop smoking in the last twelve months. The majority, two third of persons, tried to stop smoking without assistance, followed by medication, stop smoking services and E-cigarettes. While in Romania less smokers tried to stop smoking with assistance, in Sweden the majority of smokers tried to stop smoking with assistance. The main assistance methods were: medication, stop smoking services and alternative tobacco products, more methods being tried at one smoker.(11,12)

Romanian legislators enforced and completed the existing tobacco control legislation and put in place a total ban on smoking in all public places and workplaces, including restaurants, bars, and clubs.(13) In addition to providing effective protection for non-smokers against second-hand smoking, these regulations would be supportive for smokers in their attempt to quit smoking and, as a result, will contribute to the decreasing trends in the prevalence of smoking in Romania.(7)

### CONCLUSIONS

Half of employees are smokers or have tried to smoke, a quarter of them are considered regular smokers and a fifth of them are daily smokers, both men and women.

Half of the respondents never participated in a specific training to learn about dangers of smoking, but also a large part of them would be interested in such training, which justify the need and importance of research on smoking, widening cessation and prevention activities.

In over a quarter of cases smoking is allowed inside the house, which requires reassessment of the rules.

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