

PRESS RELEASE

Croatian Medical Journal
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A quarter of Croatian smokers renounced cigarettes on the first day of Lent

ZAGREB – Although a vast majority of Croatian people are Roman Catholics, only a quarter of Croatian smokers quit cigarettes on the first day of Lent – traditionally a period of self-denial for observant Catholics, a new study shows.

Nevertheless, authors of the study published in the February issue of Croatian Medical Journal conclude that Lent could be a good time to start a public health program against smoking.

The study was performed in the first week of Lent 2003 to assess the effect of the campaign “Say yes to no smoking” and the first national “Smoke out day” which was organised on March 5 as a part of the campaign. Anonymous survey was conducted on a sample of 2,143 listeners and viewers of radio and TV programs in Croatia aged 15 and older. Among them, there were 903 smokers – 547 men and 356 women. More than 85% of the interviewed have heard or the “Smoke out day” activity, but only 245 (27%) of smokers renounced cigarettes that day. Women were more ready to do so than men – 34% against 22%. Most of the abstainers were in the 30-44 age group, followed by those aged 15-29.

Among smokers, 15% had primary school education, 64% secondary school education, 8% had university education, and 12,4 were students. The lowest response to “Smoke out day” was among smokers with university education.

The results of the study show that the “Smoke out day” activity was well organised and covered by the media. Since women and younger smokers responded better than men and older smokers, authors suggest that the similar campaigns in the future should be directed primarily to women and younger age groups.

Authors also notice that their study is the first to measure the impact of a one-day antismoking activity followed by a well structured media campaign and combined with religious event

such as the first day of Lent. Although there were previous studies on different public antismoking interventions, none of them tried to find the best moment to organize a public health activity such as “Smoke out day.” Therefore it is not possible to know if the results of the study would be different if the activity was organized on any other day of the year, conclude the authors.

The study was conducted by Marta Čivljak, Dragan Soldo and Stipe Orešković from the Andrija Štampar School of Public Health, Zagreb; Zlatko Ulovec from the Zagreb University School of Dental Medicine, and Marija Posavec from the Zagreb Public Health Institute.

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