

PRESS RELEASE

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Smoking among Roma is part of the family culture

ZAGREB – Smoking among Roma is part of family life, acceptable for men and women, adults and children alike, shows a study published in the Croatian Medical Journal. By interviewing participants of the study, researchers found that Roma mothers do not actively prohibit smoking to their children and that smoking motivates children to start working and earn money for the cigarettes. Parents quickly accept that their children smoke, because smoking for the Roma is part of growing up.

The study included 12 representatives of the Roma community in southern Slovenia, who were invited to join two focus groups to discuss smoking-related issues. The applied method of qualitative research could not give any statistical data or scientific proof, but it could help in understanding the processes which underlie behavioral patterns.

The study indicated that the Roma have basic knowledge about the harmful effects of cigarettes on health, but they do not seriously consider quitting. It seems that the Roma do not see smoking as harmful to everybody; they believe destiny decides on who will get sick. Even symptoms of lung illnesses do not alarm them to change their smoking behavior.

The Roma perceive physicians only as a source of information on smoking-related diseases and providers of medications for better breathing. In response to physician's advice to stop smoking, they felt that switching to lighter cigarettes was as much as they could do.

Although a nationwide preventive program in Slovenia in the last decade has led to a slight decrease in the smoking population, it has failed to reach Roma people. "It is difficult to find an effective method to change smoking behavior among the Roma", write the authors of the study, adding that education is quite insufficient. They suggest that medical and social workers who are familiar with Roma should be involved in the development of preventive programs tailored to their culture.

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