

Peer Education of Tobacco Issues in Hungarian Communities of Roma and Socially Disadvantaged Children

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Summary: Objective: The aim of this demonstration program was to examine the effectiveness of peer education in disseminating tobacco related information and influencing knowledge, attitudes and beliefs related to smoking in socially disadvantaged youth communities.

Method: Peer educators were trained to become messengers of tobacco issues. Intervention sites were selected. Self-administered questionnaires were used to assess the effectiveness of interventions. Recommendations were drawn up on the inclusion of peer conducted health education into the comprehensive program of the Ministry of Health to improve the health situation of Roma (Gypsy) and disadvantaged population groups.

Results: Peer educators were recognised as trustworthy mediators of tobacco related information. Interventions resulted in an improved level of knowledge of and changes in attitudes towards smoking in the targeted youth communities.

Conclusions: The program demonstrated that peer education is an effective tool to raise awareness on smoking issues in communities of Roma and disadvantaged children, when multiple socio-cultural-environmental factors facilitate the taking up of unhealthy habits. If disseminated, this tool could be effective in helping reduce teenage smoking in these communities.

Key words: peer education, Roma and socially disadvantaged children, tobacco

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