

PostScript

LETTERS

European smokefree class competition: a measure to decrease smoking in youth

This letter corrects misleading and incorrect statements about the smokefree class competition (SFC) in a recent paper.¹

Statement 1. "Modified versions of this competition should be developed, using ... group influence in a positive way. For instance, a non-smoking contest is being developed in Geneva using student's creativity and peer support in the class" (p. 759).

- The authors fail to say that one of them is involved in the initiative they promote.
- What they describe as "new approach... to smoking prevention" (p. 759) is a copy of SFC: classes have to stay smokefree for several months and can win prizes.
- Their assumption that "using of student's creativity" is a new component in their version of SFC is wrong: this component was added to SFC years ago and most of the participating countries apply it.

Statement 2. "The competition is based on a logic of exclusion, suspicion, and mistrust" (p. 759). "...the central principle is ... to apply negative peer pressure upon teenage smokers" (p. 757).

- Empirical data indicate different conclusions: in a representative population based sample of 6887 Swiss students and 440 teachers there was no difference regarding violence among classes participating in SFC and non-participating classes. Compared with non-participating classes, classroom climate was better in classes participating in SFC.
- In a study with 2695 pupils from Wales, 33.6% in the SFC group reported having been victims of bullying, compared with 38.4% in the comparison group.
- The authors assert that negative peer pressure is a central principle in SFC. At the same time, they presume that their copy of SFC provokes "group influence in a positive way" (p. 759). As copy and original SFC are almost identical, they should provoke the same kind of group influence.

Statement 3. "Non-voluntary test of saliva cotinine to detect tobacco use" (p. 758).

- This paragraph has nothing to do with the European SFC; none of the European Member States partners of SFC has applied tests of salivary cotinine.

Statement 4. "Scarce evidence for ... efficacy" (p. 757).

- Two controlled and two RCTs evaluated the campaign,²⁻⁵ three of them indicating short term effects regarding smoking initiation.

All studies were published in peer reviewed journals, one being classified as number 1 study in the Cochrane review.

Statement 5. "Lack of a theoretical basis" (p. 759).

- The theoretical foundation of SFC and the copy of the competition in Geneva are identical: social learning theory.

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European smokefree class competition: a measure to decrease smoking in youth – authors' reply

We are honoured by the response of an impressive international panel of stakeholders of the smokefree class competition to our recent comment on this programme.¹ It is true that one of us (PB) is involved in a local initiative developing a classroom contest, but this is an unimportant detail, not a central point of our 2006 paper. This modest project