

Letter to the Editor Regarding the Article “Addressing the Risks of the New Tobacco Product Wave in Portugal”

Carta ao Editor Relativa ao Artigo “Abordando os Riscos da Nova Onda de Produtos de Tabaco em Portugal”

Keywords: Adolescent; Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems; Portugal; Smoking; Tobacco Products; Vaping

Palavras-chave: Adolescente; Fumar; Portugal; Produtos do Tabaco; Sistemas Electrónicos de Administração de Nicotina; Vaping

New tobacco and nicotine products have recently emerged and are very popular among adolescents and young adults. They represent a recent and significant challenge to public health and youth behavior.^{1,2} These new devices have become gateway products for tobacco use, often used to circumvent restrictions in public places and to attract new users through promotions, flavors, and modern designs.¹⁻³

Across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, a slightly greater proportion of girls (15%) than boys (14%) reported smoking cigarettes in 2022. Despite the decreasing consumption of traditional tobacco in the last decade, consumption rates of other tobacco products have increased from 3% to 6% among adults in the OECD. The OECD data confirms that the use of electronic cigarettes is more prevalent in the female population (21%) than in the male population (18%).³

In Portugal, from 1987 to 2006, the prevalence of tobacco use among men aged 15 years and older showed a slight decrease of 2.7%. The opposite happened among women, with an increase in consumption of 6.8% in all age groups.⁴ This topic deserves greater attention since nicotine dependence is mostly acquired during adolescence, a phase in which the brain is more vulnerable to addiction.¹ Additionally, it is known that the use of new tobacco products at young age is associated with a higher probability of initiating cigarette use later in life.³ A large proportion of teenagers are already smokers by the age of 12 or 13, so it is recommended that primary prevention begins in schools before this age.^{4,5}

Regardless of this worrying practice, it was found that in 2022, while the OECD average for 15-year-olds who used electronic cigarette was 15%, Portugal recorded a rate of less than 10%. This percentage places Portugal among the

countries with the lowest consumption in this age group, along with Iceland, Norway, and Ireland, which contrasts with countries like Hungary and Italy, where consumption exceeds 25%.³

As physicians conducting intensive smoking cessation support in a primary healthcare unit, we have observed that heated tobacco and electronic cigarettes are frequently used by smokers attempting to quit, either on their own initiative or at the suggestion of friends/family. This situation is also described in the literature, which states that most people who use other tobacco products to support their smoking cessation process do so without qualified medical assistance.¹

Intensive smoking cessation counseling, conducted in specialized units by multidisciplinary teams, plays a fundamental role in addressing new tobacco and nicotine products.^{1,3}

Preventive interventions in schools and increased investment in preventive actions in the community must be ongoing priorities. Teenagers who smoke believe that they can easily quit smoking at any time, but only about 4% of the smokers aged 12 to 19 succeed in quitting smoking every year.¹ Family physicians play an important role in preventing smoking and helping parents to quit, which can have a huge impact on the present and future health of children.⁴

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to this manuscript and approved the final version to be published.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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