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Towards a 100% smoke-free Portugal: No more delays



Para um Portugal 100% livre de tabaco: Sem mais demoras

We read with the greatest of interest the study by Paradela et al., 2013 assessing self-reported exposure (e) to second-hand smoke (SHS) in private/public enclosed settings.¹ Although only a regional survey, it is one of the few that has assessed post-ban perception about the change in SHSe. The main findings are:

- Exposure to SHS is high, significantly higher in public leisure settings where vulnerable populations such as young people should be protected by law.
- Young adults are highly exposed.
- Perceived exposure in the home and workplaces is similar to the pre-ban period.¹

In 2013, a similar survey conducted in Covilhã observed the same trends. Furthermore, several studies have reported: (1) high SHSe in restaurants/casinos/bars/discos/mental health services; (2) patchy compliance with the ban, specially in settings which allow exemptions; (3) poor ban enforcement² (non-published research: Calheiros et al., 2010; Ravara et al., 2012; Reis et al., 2011). Moreover, Portuguese children's exposure to SHS is high³; one of the highest in the EU (non-published research: Reis et al., Democopes 2012), several studies have reported low motivation to quit, few attempts at giving up, and an increasing prevalence among youth and females.⁴ These indicators mirror the failure of tobacco control policies enacted by successive governments/legislators. At the moment, the Portuguese government is about to revise the smoke-free policy (SFP). The government has publicly announced its intention to pass a 100% SFP. However, an 8 years moratorium has been proposed for hospitality venues, allowing smoking and ventilation systems, in order to "compensate for the investment made".

While governments and legislators are elected to promote the health and well-being of all Portuguese citizens, they have mostly protected tobacco industry and other "vested interests". The consequence of this is a major

toll of death, disability, and suffering and it promotes health and social inequalities and threatens the country economy and welfare.⁵ WHO clearly emphasises that only 100% SFPs protect against SHSe⁵ and stresses that exemptions, such as the moratorium presented by the current Portuguese government, are common tactics of the tobacco industry to block SFP implementation.⁵ Moreover, an eminent Portuguese constitutionalist has stated that SFP exemptions are unconstitutional: while failing to protect all citizens, they violate the general principle of health protection of Portuguese law.² The Portuguese public health community should publicly denounce the interference of the tobacco industry in policy-making, accordingly to article 5.3 of WHO-FCTC treaty⁵; and demand a 100% smoke-free Portugal without any exemptions or delays; as part of a comprehensive, adequately funded and enforced tobacco control programme.^{4,5} This would comply with the Portuguese government's obligation following the WHO-FCTC ratification in 2005.⁵

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