

“HEALTHY YOUTH” – A PROJECT TO PROMOTE SAFE AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLES FOR YOUNG WORKERS

1. Description of the case

1.1. Introduction

Over the past few years there has been an attempt to popularize a new concept of health, no longer as a goal to be reached but as a “necessary good for social, economic and personal development...” where “people themselves are the greatest resource” (The Ottawa Charter, 1986¹). The promotion of good health is carried out in the spheres of both individual and community life. In the former case through the measures aimed to modify individual behaviours, for example by encouraging people to adopt healthier lifestyles. In the latter case by improving the environment, and working and living conditions that have an effect on health.

The **Healthy Youth** project has been developed by the National Institute of Health (ISS) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. It has involved young workers from both the public and private sectors of a select number of Italian cities. The aim is to promote a culture based on healthy lifestyles which can help young workers to appreciate the pleasures of life while safeguarding their own health.

Unhealthy lifestyles (poor diet, excessive drinking, smoking, lack of exercise) have negative repercussions not only on the health of the individuals but on their work environment as well, resulting in a steadily increasing financial burden which weighs heavily on the national welfare system.

The project deals with the following modifiable risk factors:

- diet;
- exercise;
- alcohol;
- smoking.

Diet

A healthy diet is an extremely important factor in the prevention of many illnesses and in the management and treatment of many more. The proportions of the type and quality of food people eat provide the basis for well-rounded physical and mental human development.

Exercise

A sedentary lifestyle may cause:

- in addition to other risk factors, the development of various chronic illnesses, in particular those which are related to the cardiovascular system;
- poorer metabolism of glucose;
- increased blood pressure;
- obesity.

¹ http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/ottawa_charter_hp.pdf

CASE STUDIES

According to scientific evidence, only 30 minutes of physical activity per day (walking, swimming, cycling, etc.) are enough to provide positive health benefits.

Smoking

Tobacco smoking is one of the principal risk factors in the development of numerous chronic and degenerative illnesses and is the cause of an increase in the number of deaths by cardiovascular diseases. As far as respiratory illnesses are concerned, smoking cigarettes is the highest risk factor, causing death by pulmonary diseases such as lung tumours and chronic obstructive broncho-pulmonary (COBP) diseases.

Alcohol

For many people, having a drink with friends is one of the necessary pleasures of life. For some, however, drinking can be the cause of numerous problems. The risks related to habitual drinking and the possible consequences of it can impact not only the drinker but his or her family and others as well. These consequences can also affect those who do not drink or have made a conscious decision not to do so. This is the case in traffic accidents caused by driving under the influence of alcohol and in incidences of violence and crime related to alcohol consumption.

1.2. Aims

This project aims at developing an educational project that will support young workers by promoting healthy lifestyles. The goal is to introduce a widespread culture of prevention and promotion that goes beyond occupational safety regulations. The attempt is to constantly improve young workers' health by offering support regarding the most appropriate behaviours to adopt in order to have a healthy lifestyle.

The project focuses on promotion of a healthy and appropriate diet, a less sedentary lifestyle and on raising awareness of the damages that alcohol and smoking can cause. The limits that must be imposed in order to avoid addiction are stated. In the case where addictions already exist, users are directed to specialized treatment centres.

The project also aims to encourage young workers to make the most of their personal skills and talents, thus increasing individuals' self-esteem and self-confidence. The use of pharmacological remedies to improve their performance or state of well-being is reduced as well.

1.3. What was done, and how?

To gain an understanding of young workers' lifestyles, a survey was conducted in various public and private companies (chosen using a non-probabilistic method) in a select number of Italian cities. The survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire organised in such a way as to cover each individual's entire day: from breakfast to work, from physical activity to going out in the evening. This made it possible to discover, in a short period of time, how young workers live and perceive their own lifestyles. The results obtained are based on the evaluation of 2551 questionnaires whose subjects were aged an average of 41 (5.2% aged 18-24) consisting of 63% men and 37% women.

The results obtained from the questionnaires called attention to the following points on young workers:

- they are well-informed about smoking but have difficulty quitting;
- they choose healthy food but the consumption is excessive, especially by men;
- a greater consumption of alcohol during the weekend;
- the most common physical exercise and/or sports are walking outdoors and going to the gym.

CASE STUDIES

A case was then produced containing four booklets, one for each of the topics being examined in the project, and these cases were then distributed to **5800 workers** (including young workers) from the companies involved in the project. Positive results were observed as far as appreciation of the materials distributed and a tendency to modify some unhealthy lifestyle choices.

The booklets are easy to read and contain explanatory images to clearly communicate the key concepts necessary for adopting a healthy lifestyle. The topics are addressed in a way that allows a rapid comprehension of the basic rules that need to be followed in order to maintain or reacquire a good state of health. In other words, they provide advice that helps to remain “YOUNG” and “HEALTHY” by making small and simple changes in one’s daily life.

The case contains the following booklets:

- **Half portions on the plate**
To gain an understanding of how to control your weight and body mass index by decreasing portion size without giving up the food you love best.
- **Good health travels on foot**
Exercise keeps you young, and walking for 30 minutes every day is the most natural and the cheapest way to maintain good health.
- **Large glasses, small glasses**
Keep your distance from alcohol for a healthier, safer life.
- **The price of smoking**
How to quit smoking and who can you go to for help.

2000 additional booklet cases were then distributed during conventions on the topic of good health and healthy lifestyles. Individuals could also order them online. These orders came from private entities whose fundamental mission is to improve people’s quality of life as well as from companies asking for the “case” produced by ISS as supporting material for their own pre-existing company programmes designed to address the problems of alcohol consumption and smoking, especially among young workers.

Figure 1: the four booklets



1.4. What was achieved?

Overall, the results of this project led to:

- a better knowledge of which types of lifestyles can be considered healthy;
- a strong tendency among the young workers to change some of their unhealthy behaviours at the workplace and outside;
- a high level of appreciation for the materials developed and distributed.

1.5. Success factors

The use of a structured information gathering tool (questionnaire) organised in such a way as to cover an individual's entire day contributed to success of this project. This made it possible to discover, in a short period of time, how young workers live and perceive their own lifestyles.

The introduction of a widespread culture of prevention that goes beyond workplace safety regulations in an attempt to constantly improve young workers' health was another success factor. This was achieved by offering suggestions regarding the most appropriate behaviours to adopt in order to have a healthy lifestyle and in the interest of overall well-being.

1.6. Further information

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1.7. Transferability

The entire booklet case is addressed to young workers group in general. It contains the basic important rules for a healthy lifestyle and can be adapted to any workplace and sector. It can be obtained on request by filling out and sending in the appropriate [request form](#) to the ISS National Observatory on Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs (address included in the form).

2. References, resources

<http://www.iss.it/ofad/prog/cont.php?id=324&lang=1&tipo=9>