

Strengthening advocacy and collaboration to prevent early smoking and vaping initiation among adolescents in Manjung, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Early initiation of smoking and vaping among Malaysian adolescents is a critical public health issue. Addressing this requires multi-sectoral strategies involving advocacy, policy enforcement, and community action. In line with Act 852, the District Health Office of Manjung (PKD Manjung) and the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) implemented a targeted health education program to prevent tobacco use among at-risk adolescents. This study aimed to evaluate its effectiveness. A pilot intervention entitled “No Vape, Strong Weyh!” was developed as a structured education module grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, the Health Belief Model, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Social-Emotional Learning. Thirty students (11- 12 years old) identified through school referral as at risk of smoking and vaping participated. The program, delivered via interactive sessions, emphasized risk awareness, refusal skills, and coping strategies. Pre- and post-intervention assessments measured perceptions of smoking using the Bahasa Malaysia Perception Towards Smoking Questionnaire (BMPTSQ; 8-item Likert scale), and behavioral intentions (adapted WHO Youth Tobacco Survey). Data analysed using McNemar’s test and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. Most participants (n=20; 67%) had never tried smoking or vaping, though several reported initiation as early as age seven. Exposure remained high, with 50% witnessing smoking at home, 60% in public or media, and 30% having been offered tobacco products. Post-intervention, perceptions towards negative impact of smoking improved significantly (median score increase from 31 to 33, p-value < 0.001), and all participants indicated refusal of future cigarette or e-cigarette offers. Discomfort around smokers rose from 60% to 70%. The intervention strengthened advocacy messages and created a supportive environment for policy translation. This project highlights the effectiveness collaboration in adolescent tobacco prevention. Integrating advocacy, policy, and education offers a replicable model, with future expansion requiring stronger policy enforcement and community engagement to sustain smoke-free environments and curb early nicotine initiation.

Keywords: Adolescents, Smoking and Vaping, Policy Act 852, Advocacy and Health Education, Nicotine and Tobacco