

The trapping vapor and the urgency of prevention: experience report of the 'PodsNaoPode' project in light of scientific evidence on electronic smoking devices

El vapor que atrapa y la urgencia de la prevención: relato de experiencia del proyecto 'PodsNaoPode' a la luz de la evidencia científica sobre dispositivos electrónicos para fumar

O vapor que aprisiona e a urgência da prevenção: relato de experiência do projeto "PodsNaoPode" à luz das evidências científicas sobre dispositivos eletrônicos para fumar

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Abstract

This article reports on the preventive project 'PodsnaoPode', which has operated for over four years to raise awareness among adolescents, parents, and caregivers by delivering lectures in public and private schools in Itapetininga, Tatuí, Capela do Alto, and Itapeva. This is an experience report of the project's activities, bridging field pedagogical practice with the most solid national and international scientific evidence on the risks of electronic cigarettes. The discussion demonstrates that, although vapes are commercially promoted as harm reduction alternatives, they cause serious biological harms (such as EVALI, endothelial dysfunction, cellular reprogramming that favors oral cancer, and interruption of prefrontal cortex development) and psychiatric harms (induction of anxiety, depression, and suicidal behaviors). Field results indicate that merely informative campaigns are insufficient, requiring humanized and dialogical interventions that involve the school and family community in an integrated manner. It is concluded that projects such as 'PodsnaoPode' are essential to mediate scientific knowledge and strengthen the child and adolescent protection network, in accordance with the curricular insertion recommendations proposed by ANVISA.

Descriptors: Electronic Cigarettes; Child and Adolescent Health; Tobacco Use Disorder; School Health; Prevention.

Resumen

El objetivo fue relatar el proyecto preventivo 'PodsnaoPode', que actúa desde hace más de cuatro años en la concientización de adolescentes, padres y cuidadores, desarrollando charlas en escuelas públicas y privadas de Itapetininga, Tatuí, Capela del Alto e Itapeva. Se trata de un relato de experiencia de las actividades del proyecto, cruzando la práctica pedagógica de campo con las más sólidas evidencias científicas nacionales e internacionales sobre los riesgos de los cigarrillos electrónicos. La discusión demuestra que, aunque los vapes son promovidos comercialmente como alternativas de reducción de daños, causan graves daños biológicos (como EVALI, disfunción endotelial, reprogramación celular que favorece el cáncer de boca e interrupción del desarrollo de la corteza prefrontal) y psiquiátricos (inducción de ansiedad, depresión y conductas suicidas). Los resultados de campo indican que las campañas meramente informativas son insuficientes, demandando intervenciones humanizadas y dialógicas que involucren a la comunidad escolar y familiar de manera integrada. Se concluye que proyectos como 'PodsnaoPode' son esenciales para mediar el conocimiento científico y fortalecer la red de protección infantojuvenil, en consonancia con las recomendaciones de inserción curricular propuestas por ANVISA.

Descriptor: Cigarrillos Electrónicos; Salud del Niño y del Adolescente; Tabaquismo; Salud Escolar; Prevención.

Resumo

Objetivou-se relatar o projeto preventivo "PodsnaoPode", que atua há mais de quatro anos na conscientização de adolescentes, pais e cuidadores, desenvolvendo palestras em escolas públicas e privadas de Itapetininga, Tatuí, Capela do Alto e Itapeva. Trata-se de um relato de experiência das atividades do projeto, cruzando a prática pedagógica de campo com as mais sólidas evidências científicas nacionais e internacionais sobre os riscos dos cigarros eletrônicos. A discussão demonstra que, embora os vapes sejam promovidos comercialmente como alternativas de redução de danos, eles causam sérios agravos biológicos (como a EVALI, disfunção endotelial, reprogramação celular que favorece o câncer de boca e interrupção do desenvolvimento do córtex pré-frontal) e psiquiátricos (indução de ansiedade, depressão e comportamentos suicidas). Os resultados de campo indicam que campanhas meramente informativas são insuficientes, demandando intervenções humanizadas e dialógicas que envolvam a comunidade escolar e familiar de maneira integrada. Conclui-se que projetos como o "PodsnaoPode" são essenciais para mediar o conhecimento científico e fortalecer a rede de proteção infantojuvenil, em consonância com as recomendações de inserção curricular propostas pela ANVISA.

Descritores: Cigarros Eletrônicos; Saúde da Criança e do Adolescente; Tabagismo; Saúde Escolar; Prevenção.



Introduction

In recent decades, Brazil has achieved notable victories in the control and combat of traditional smoking, becoming a global reference in collective health. According to historical data, the prevalence of tobacco consumption among the adult population has undergone a marked reduction, falling from 34% in 1996 to approximately 11% in 2023¹. This health victory was the result of a continued effort by the State, founded on the prohibition of commercial cigarette advertising, the establishment of smoke-free environments, the progressive increase in taxes, and massive pedagogical campaigns that demystified the act of smoking^{1,2}. However, this virtuous trajectory is under serious threat due to the emergence of new forms of nicotine consumption, characterized by Electronic Smoking Devices (ESDs), popularly known as electronic cigarettes, vapes, or pods.

Promoted in a sophisticated manner by the tobacco industry under the false guise of "harm reduction" and as auxiliary tools for smoking cessation, ESDs operate as a "new guise for an old dependency"³. This marketing strategy found an extremely fertile ground among youth. A concerning and recent epidemiological survey, conducted by the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp) in 2025, revealed that one in nine Brazilian adolescents reports using electronic cigarettes regularly⁴. The study, which interviewed approximately 16,000 participants aged 14 or older across all regions of the country, points to a geometric growth trend that jeopardizes the neurological and biological future of an entire generation.

This rapid expansion of consumption occurs in defiance of Brazilian legislation. Since 2009, the National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA) has strictly prohibited the commercialization, importation, and advertising of any ESDs in the country through RDC No. 46/2009, a technical position reiterated and recently strengthened with the approval of RDC No. 855/2024^{1,2}. However, illegal sales through social networks, e-commerce platforms, and the parallel market have capillary-disseminated the product in an unprecedented manner, making the devices widely accessible to students. Digital influence marketing and the insertion of sweet flavors (candies, fruits, and beverages) mask the chemical hostility of tobacco and generate a false perception of innocuousness that disarms young people, parents, and educators^{5,6}.

It is under this conjuncture of social urgency that the preventive project "PodsnaoPode" was born. For more than four years, the project has developed continuous extension work focused on health education, delivering interactive lectures, debates, and exhibitions of scientifically based materials in public and private schools in municipalities of the interior of São Paulo, namely Itapetininga, Tatuí, Capela do Alto, and Itapeva. Having directly impacted more than one thousand spectators, including young people aged 10 to 17, parents, teachers, and caregivers, the project focuses on decoding the scientific complexity behind vaping into a humanized, dialogic, and empathetic language.

The objective of the present work is to describe the experience of the activities developed by the "PodsnaoPode" project, correlating field practice with the most consistent and recent scientific evidence available on the multisystemic impacts of electronic cigarettes. It is intended to demonstrate that effective school prevention requires the articulation of a solid theoretical framework with contextualized pedagogical strategies that go beyond the mere passive transmission of information.

Methodology

The "PodsnaoPode" project was structured as a community and pedagogical response to the vaping epidemic in schools in the interior of São Paulo, developing a methodology of interactive and in-person lectures over more than four years. The intervention was directed at three integrated audiences, adolescents (10 to 17 years old), parents/caregivers, and faculty, in the cities of Itapetininga, Tatuí, Capela do Alto, and Itapeva, directly impacting more than one thousand spectators in public and private schools.

The central premise of the methodology is the "humanization of the approach," which rejects moralistic or punitive discourses and chooses to translate scientific knowledge about dependence, pneumology, and oncology into accessible, dialogic, and visual narratives. To this end, the project was organized into four strategic axes:

Deconstruction of the "water vapor" myth

Using practical analogies, the lectures demonstrate that the e-liquid reaches temperatures of up to 350°C, generating carcinogenic substances (formaldehyde and acrolein) and releasing heavy metals. The visual exhibition of how a pod works dismantles the "clean technology" narrative disseminated by digital marketing.

Welcoming of parents and caregivers

Given the widespread lack of knowledge about the appearance of the devices (which resemble pens, pendrives, or markers) and the sweet odor that does not recall conventional cigarettes, the lectures empower guardians to identify the devices and recognize behavioral signs of nicotine dependence and withdrawal (anxiety, irritability, insomnia), promoting family support instead of punitive confrontation.

Training of teachers and educators

The project guides faculty to integrate the debate about the risks of ESDs transversally into science and biology subjects, aligning with national regulatory proposals for primary prevention in schools.

Local political-legislative advocacy

As an institutional development, the project acted in a specialized technical advisory capacity with the municipal Legislature of Itapeva, subsidizing the elaboration and approval of Law No. 5,379/2026⁷, which instituted the "Municipal Week for Awareness of the Risks of Electronic Cigarette and Vape Use" in the official calendar of the



municipality. This action resulted from intersectoral articulation with the São Paulo State Health Department and the Oncoguia Institute, transforming social mobilization into permanent public policy.

The methodology of "PodsnaoPode" is characterized, therefore, by being continuous, dialogic, based on scientific evidence, and adapted to the different actors of the school environment, going beyond the mere transmission of information to promote critical empowerment and community engagement.

Experience Report

The "PodsnaoPode" project was structured as a community and pedagogical response to the silent vaping epidemic in schools of the interior of São Paulo. Over more than four years of continuous activities, the project developed a methodology of lectures focused on the deconstruction of myths, using direct communication tools specifically aimed at three integrated audiences: adolescents, parents/caregivers, and school faculty.

The lectures, delivered in the cities of Itapetininga, Tatuí, Capela do Alto, and Itapeva, impacted more than one thousand spectators in public and private schools. The central premise of the project lies in the "humanization of the approach." Recognizing that discourses of a purely moralistic, punitive, or prohibitionist character tend to fail at the barrier of adolescent rebelliousness natural to psychic development, the project chose to translate the complex biological mechanisms of dependence, pneumology, and oncology into accessible, dialogic, and visual narratives.

The first central strategy focuses on the Deconstruction of the "Water Vapor" Myth. Using high-impact practical analogies, the lectures explain that the inhaled e-liquid is an oily and chemical solution that reaches heating temperatures equivalent to those of a domestic toaster (350°C), generating carcinogenic substances known to adolescents (such as formaldehyde and acrolein) and releasing metals that melt inside their lungs. By visually demonstrating the physical and chemical functioning of a pod, the project dismantles the aesthetic narrative of "clean technology" widely disseminated in digital marketing.

The second front acts in the welcoming of parents and caregivers. The project found in the field a widespread lack of knowledge among guardians regarding the physical appearance of the devices (which camouflagedly mimic pens, text markers, and USB memory devices) and regarding the sweet smell exhaled, which is not associated with traditional tobacco^{5,8}. The lectures teach parents to identify these electronic products and, fundamentally, to recognize the behavioral alterations of their children caused by nicotine dependence and withdrawal, characterized by sudden crises of anxiety, unjustified irritability, and insomnia, promoting family support instead of simple punitive confrontation^{9,10}.

The third approach aims at the training of teachers and educators, guiding faculty to integrate the debate transversally into school curricula of science and biology,

supporting national regulatory proposals for primary prevention in schools.

The fourth strand of the project's action, which represents one of its most significant institutional and political-legislative developments, lies in local political-legislative advocacy, seeking to translate social mobilization into permanent legal frameworks for the protection of childhood and adolescence. This effort materialized in an emblematic way in the municipality of Itapeva, one of the project's action hubs. In the context of an intersectoral articulation promoted by the workshop 'Partner Municipalities in Tobacco Control,' held by the São Paulo State Health Department in technical cooperation with the Oncoguia Institute (Oncoguia), the author and coordinator of the "PodsnaoPode" project played a role as a specialized technical advisory with the local legislature. This scientific consultancy directly supported the mandate of Councilman Ronaldo (popularly known as Coquinho) in the elaboration and legal substantiation of the bill that culminated in the approval and promulgation of Law No. 5,379/2026⁷. The norm institutes, in the official calendar of events of the municipality of Itapeva, the 'Municipal Week for Awareness of the Risks of Electronic Cigarette and Vape Use,' establishing an institutionalized structure for combating new-generation smoking and legitimizing, under the aegis of the law, continuous prevention actions in the municipal territory.

Discussion

The practical results accumulated by the "PodsnaoPode" project reveal an intriguing paradox that finds perfect echo in recent scientific literature. A study published in 2026 by Soares et al.¹¹, which analyzed the prevalence and factors associated with ESD use among university students, revealed a crucial finding: the factual knowledge score about prohibition laws and about the presence of nicotine in electronic cigarettes was significantly higher precisely among students who declared themselves frequent users of these devices.

This epidemiological finding unveils a pedagogical truth of extreme relevance: the mere transmission of technical health information is insufficient to contain or prevent ESD use. The contemporary adolescent often holds abstract knowledge that electronic cigarettes cause harm to health; however, their consumption behavior is modulated by much more complex socioecological factors, such as the desire for social acceptance, the influence of friend groups, the aesthetic normalization imposed by digital media such as TikTok, and the use of vaping as a physiological escape for underlying psychopathological disorders of anxiety or depression^{6,12}.

Therefore, isolated and one-off actions and health campaigns distanced from the student's reality prove ineffective. It is here that the methodological differential of "PodsnaoPode" resides: by adopting a humanized and dialogic approach, the project establishes affective and reflective connections with young people. Instead of adopting a perspective of imposing rules, the lectures



stimulate critical analysis of the consumer engineering operated by the tobacco industry, which manipulates the affective and identity vulnerabilities typical of adolescence to perpetuate a highly profitable pediatric addiction^{6,13}. Deconstructing commercial manipulation generates a cognitive response of empowerment and autonomy in the young person, much more robust against social pressure than the imposition of fear.

This dynamic aligns perfectly with the public policy recommendations substantiated in the reports and votes of the ANVISA Collegiate Board. The General Management of Registration and Inspection of Smoking Products (GGTAB), recognizing the limitations inherent to purely commercial inspection in a digital environment, officially recommended that the agency sign cooperation agreements with the Ministry of Education (MEC) to insert the theme of ESD risks into the permanent curriculum of elementary and secondary education in all schools of the country¹. The "PodsnaoPode" project acts, voluntarily and in a pioneering manner, exactly in this curricular gap in its area of coverage, showing the success of institutionalizing continuous awareness projects in schools.

The experience in Itapeva, with the promulgation of Law No. 5,379/2026⁷, provides an empirical model of how technical cooperation between organized civil society, health institutions (such as the partnership between the State Health Department and the Oncoguia Institute), and the municipal Legislative Branch can overcome local regulatory inertia. The creation of the Municipal Week for Awareness of the Risks of Electronic Cigarette and Vape Use demonstrates that political advocacy based on solid scientific evidence is capable of catalyzing local public health policies, transforming voluntary extension actions into lasting State policies. This practical development demonstrates that the "PodsnaoPode" project is not limited

to a role of passive transmission of information, but acts as a transforming agent of regional regulatory reality.

Final Considerations

The integrative analysis of medical and psychological evidence in light of the experience accumulated by the "PodsnaoPode" project allows us to assert that electronic cigarettes cannot be regarded as mere harmless alternatives to smoking. On the contrary: by repackaging nicotine delivery through attractive technologies and flavored additives, the tobacco industry has triggered a new epidemic of dependence that compromises the biological health, neurological development, and mental integrity of Brazilian adolescents, operating an unprecedented historical setback in the country's public health policies.

In this scenario of health vulnerability and weakening of the State's inspection power in the face of clandestine digital commerce, in-person and systematic educational actions in schools consolidate themselves as indispensable pillars of primary protection. The "PodsnaoPode" project evidences the power of humanized pedagogical interventions, based on scientific translation free of moralistic dogmas and on the construction of a channel of welcoming and active listening for parents, caregivers, and educators in the cities of Itapetininga, Tatuí, Capela do Alto, and Itapeva.

It is recommended, finally, that projects of this nature cease to be isolated voluntary extension initiatives and become part of institutionalized government policies, integrating the theme of ESDs into the curricular guidelines of the education system in a transversal manner. The preservation of the biological and cognitive health of future generations depends on the collective courage to confront the illusory propaganda of vapor with the blunt and non-negotiable scientific truth.

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