

DEFEND YOUR VOICE: RESULTS OF A VOICE HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS IN THE NORTH OF PORTUGAL

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In the last decades, teachers have been shown to be a risk group concerning voice disorders all around the world. Recent studies in Portugal have calculated a national economic impact of over 4.5 million euros per year associated with voice problems in teachers. The intervention of teachers as active advocates of their own interests is crucial to ensure improvements in their working conditions and in their labour rights. This study is the first conducted in Portugal by the initiative of a teachers' syndicate and was included in a Voice Prevention Program implemented in northern Portugal and called "Defend Your Voice". Thus, the aims of this study were to evaluate the implementation of a set of voice health promotion actions for teachers, conducted during 2014-15.

The voice health promotion program developed in 2014-15 for teachers included: a) vocal awareness actions (large group approach); b) self-assessment of voice-related issues by questionnaire; c) voice screenings (individual); d) informative brochures; e) voice training program (25 hours in small group approach). The program was entirely developed by speech therapists and delivered in 10 reference schools of all 6 districts of northern Portugal region. Results were measured by the number of participants and the data from the self-assessment questionnaires, the screening protocol and a questionnaire developed to assess the voice training program.

Globally in the program participated 531 teachers, 409 in the vocal awareness actions, 62 in the screenings and 122 in voice training programs. The prevalence of self-reported voice problems during the previous 12 months was 57%. From the teachers assessed in screening actions, 82% were positive, presenting problems mostly in breathing patterns, postural alignment, and phonation/voice source quality. Pitch and resonance issues were the less observed ones. Teachers reported a good/excellent global satisfaction level concerning the voice training program and perceived good evolutions in their vocal performance in classroom.

Positive impact was observed in the 2014-15 "Defend Your Voice" campaign edition. New actions are being prepared redirecting resources for specific needs and using other communication channels with larger impact in teachers' population.