



WOMEN AND TOBACCO

“Women smokers are likely to increase as the percentage of the total. Women are adopting more dominant roles in society; they have increased spending power...All in all that makes women a prime target...”

—Tobacco Reporter, 1998¹

Tobacco control is a critical women’s health issue. Today, four times as many men smoke than women but, while smoking rates among men have peaked,² cigarette smoking among women is still increasing.³ This is especially true in developing countries and a number of southern, central and eastern European countries. To the tobacco industry, sales of tobacco products to women and girls in developing countries represent one of the largest product marketing opportunities in the world.⁴

Two hundred and fifty million women smoke.⁵ If the percent of women who smoke in developing countries rise to the levels of smoking found among men, the number of women smokers in the next generation will double to more than 500 million.⁶ Because women who smoke die from the same tobacco-caused diseases as men, such an increase will have dramatic effects on women’s health and on the health and income of their families.^{1,7,8} In addition, women smokers are also at risk for developing cancer of the reproductive organs and osteoporosis.⁹ Smoking also contributes to poverty in ways that especially affect women’s health.¹⁰

Despite the known dangers to women, for decades the tobacco companies have targeted women and girls using marketing themes that associate tobacco use with the universal desire of women for independence and freedom and to be more glamorous and beautiful and with products designed specifically to appeal to women, such as flavored cigarettes and fashionable packaging.¹¹ Today the tobacco industry is using the same compelling themes to attract women in developing nations.

However, it is possible to prevent the predicted increase in tobacco use by adopting policies and programs that have already been proven to reduce tobacco use. By curtailing tobacco marketing, adopting strong health warnings, increasing the price and decreasing the affordability of tobacco products, expanding protection against secondhand smoke and carrying out effective public education and counter marketing campaigns, it is possible to prevent the predicted epidemic of tobacco-related illness and death in women around the world.

The Numbers of Women and Girls Using Tobacco in Developing Countries is Increasing

- Tobacco use rates for women and girls vary dramatically from country to country. An average of 22 percent of women in developed countries are daily smokers, but only an average of 9 percent of women in developing nations smoke.⁵
- Cigarette smoking historically always rises first among men. Cigarette smoking rose rapidly decades ago among women in many developed countries, such as Australia, Canada, the UK and the US, to levels that are comparable to male smoking and are now declining. However, the numbers are still rising in other developed countries where

women began smoking in large number more recently,⁵ and, most significantly, in developing countries.

- Wide disparities also exist from country to country in smoking rates of young girls. For example, in the US, Chile, Greece, Uruguay and many other countries there is no difference in tobacco use between girls and boys. In contrast, in Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand, China, much of India and other countries far fewer girls use tobacco than boys.¹²
- Increased rates of smoking among women are influenced by a number of factors. They are influenced by the changing roles and economic status of women as economies grow and by changing social and cultural factors as nations modernize.¹³ However, it is often targeted tobacco marketing to women that creates a link between tobacco use and these social and economic changes.¹
- The number of women smokers in the developing world will greatly increase if no action is taken to stop the tobacco companies from targeting women and girls.
- Even if the growth of smoking rates among women can be contained, the growth in the female population in the developing world alone will dramatically increase the number of women smokers.

Tobacco is Especially Harmful to the Health of Women

- All forms of tobacco are both addictive and deadly. The scientific evidence is conclusive that smoking causes a wide variety of cancers (including cancer of the lung, mouth, esophagus, larynx, pharynx, stomach, and pancreas), heart disease, stroke, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, precancerous lesions, gum disease, leukoplakia, and nicotine addiction, and a wide variety of other fatal diseases in both men and women.^{14,15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21}
- In addition, women smokers are at greater risk of developing cervical cancer and osteoporosis than non-smoking women.⁹
- Smoking by women increases the risk of spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, infertility, and having children with low birth weights who suffer from serious medical problems. Women who smoke may also experience painful menstruation and premature menopause.²²
- Women who use oral contraceptives have a significantly higher risk of heart disease if they smoke than those who do not smoke. Women smokers also have an elevated risk of stroke, hemorrhage in the membranes that surround the brain, hardening of the arteries, and death from aortic aneurysm.²²
- Tobacco use often begins by age 16, and girls have more difficulty with stopping smoking, experiencing stronger dependence on the behavior and more negative emotions during attempts to quit.^{23, 24}
- Tobacco contributes to poverty in ways that particularly affect women as caretakers and mothers. In Bangladesh, for example, a third of the population lives on less than \$1 a day and nearly half of the children under 5 years old are malnourished.¹⁰ One study found that if a female Bangladeshi smoker used the money she spends to purchase tobacco to buy food instead, she could purchase food that would provide an additional and critical 770 calories a day.³

- Tobacco use negatively affects the health of women by diverting household resources that would otherwise be spent on food and education. In Indonesia, one study found that the lowest income group spent more than 15% of their total monthly expenditures on tobacco and in Brazil they spent more of their household income on tobacco than education or vegetables.³

Tobacco Companies Target Women and Girls with Promises of Glamour, Independence and Beauty

- Globally, the tobacco industry spends billions of dollars each year on advertising. Tobacco companies promote cigarettes through every conceivable medium, including radio, television, magazines and newspapers, billboards and, recently, the Internet.⁵
- The tobacco industry is making huge investments in targeting women and girls with aggressive and seductive advertising that exploits ideas of independence, emancipation, sex appeal and slimness.^{4, 25, 26}
- Tobacco companies target women and girls with more than just advertisements; tobacco marketing campaigns also use packaging, branding, promotion, sponsorship, and integrating the product into popular culture to target women in a variety of ways.⁴ These methods include sponsoring sporting events and teams; promoting rock concerts and discos; placing their brand logos on t-shirts, rucksacks and other merchandise popular with children; and giving away free cigarettes and brand merchandise in areas where young people gather, such as rock concerts, discos and shopping malls.
- Tobacco industry targeting of women is not new. As early as the 1920's, the tobacco companies were running advertisements in the U.S. targeted at women. For example, Lucky Strike had an advertising campaign that featured phrases such as "Light a Lucky and you'll never miss sweets that make you fat."²⁸
- The tobacco industry continues to target women. In 2007 RJ Reynolds launched a new cigarette for women, Camel No. 9 backed by a major advertising campaign,²⁷ advertising in fashion magazines like Vogue with large youth readership featuring slim cigarettes in colorful and fashionable packaging, the tobacco companies continue to target women. In China, one of the state sanctioned cigarette manufacturers, the Nanjing Cigarette Factor, recently began making orange-flavored cigarettes, a flavor that is particularly appealing to Chinese women. And, the Gallagher Group, a British tobacco company, continues to market Sobraine cigarettes with gold filters in pastel packaging with names like "Slim Pinks" to women in Russia by sponsoring parties featuring cigarette advertisements and male models in tuxedos at popular nightclubs and bars.
- Research has shown that targeted marketing affects smoking rates among young women. Smoking among women in Japan increased dramatically, from 8.6 percent in 1986 to 18.2 percent in 1991, after an aggressive promotional campaign targeting women and girls.²⁸ The smoking rate for teenage girls was 2 percent in South Korea in 1988. The next year, after U.S. cigarettes were imported -- along with American-style advertising campaigns -- the smoking rate for young girls jumped to 9 percent. In the U.S., the smoking initiation rate of 12-year-old girls increased by 110 percent in the six years after the introduction of Virginia Slims.²⁹

- Western tobacco companies, such as Philip Morris, are effectively introducing their brands to women in Asian countries who identify with Western women and Western standards of beauty.³⁰
- Tobacco advertisements target women's desire for weight loss and appeal to women's growing desire for freedom of choice and independence. In India, BAT introduced the cigarette brand, "Ms.," targeted toward "emancipated women."²⁸
- "Low-tar" or "light" cigarettes were developed by cigarette companies to address the concerns of health-conscious smokers. Subsequent studies have shown that the marketing of these cigarettes have a particular appeal to women.^{1, 31} While the scientific evidence has shown that "light" cigarettes do not decrease the risk of disease risk among smokers,³² tobacco companies have aggressively marketed "light," "ultra light," and "low tar" cigarettes to smokers and to women.³² Two "light" cigarette brands were introduced in China under the names "Chahua" and "Yuren," which literally mean "pretty woman."²⁸

Better Policies Can Help Protect Women and Girls from Tobacco

- The same policies that have been proven to reduce tobacco use among men can protect women, too. Smoke-free air regulations, anti-tobacco advertising, bans on tobacco marketing and advertising, strong graphic health warnings on tobacco packaging, and increasing tobacco taxes have been proven effective in reducing tobacco use and saving lives.^{33, 34}
- Establishing 100 percent smoke-free environments, including homes and workplaces, is the most effective method for protecting people, especially women, from second-hand smoke.³⁵ In China, almost 50 percent of women ages 35-74 live with at least one smoker and more than 15 percent of these women are exposed to second-hand smoke more than 4 hours a day at work.³⁶ In the U.S., although more needs to be done to protect women workers, the numbers of women who report their workplace to be smoke-free rose by almost 25 percent between 1992 and 2002 as more state laws prohibiting indoor smoking were enacted.³⁴
- Only tax policies that cover all types of tobacco, not just cigarettes, can effectively protect all people because women and men buy different types of tobacco in different parts of the world.³⁷
- Adoption and implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which addresses issues important to protecting women and girls from the tobacco companies, such as smuggling, and access to cessation support,³⁸ can help protect all people from tobacco.

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, July 18, 2007

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