

Fact Sheet

Global Tobacco Research

Yesterday

- By the 1960s, evidence of the adverse health effects of cigarette smoking were undeniable. By 1980, evidence of the burden of tobacco related illnesses in low- and middle-income countries began to emerge.
- Since 1980, low and middle income countries have faced a rapidly escalating epidemic of tobacco use due to many factors, including globalization, urbanization, and demographic shifts in populations.
- Historically, research and prevention efforts were primarily focused on developed countries, where the tobacco epidemic was well established. There were few coordinated global efforts to address tobacco control research and practice.

Today

- Since the early 1960s the prevalence of smoking among U.S. adults declined by almost half following decades of efforts to introduce tobacco control programs and policies.
- Today, science-based research confirms that all tobacco products, including cigars, smokeless tobacco, bidis (a thin, hand-rolled unfiltered cigarette made with sun-dried tobacco), and waterpipes are hazardous. Additionally, the addictive nature of tobacco and the harmful effects of exposure to secondhand smoke on nonsmokers are clearly established.
- Tobacco represents one of the leading threats to global health. Approximately five million people die of tobacco-caused illness each year, making tobacco the second leading risk factor for global mortality. Increased tobacco use threatens to impede or reverse hard-won progress in global health. Because tobacco-related disease strikes people in the prime of their working lives, it also negatively impacts economic development.

- Cigarette smoking is increasing in low- and middle-income countries, which will bear the brunt of the tobacco epidemic in the 21st century. Without a significant shift in worldwide prevalence patterns, smoking is projected to cause roughly ten million deaths annually by 2020; notably, 70% of these deaths will occur in developing countries.
- Traditional social and cultural constraints, limited incomes and other factors have long protected women in the developing world from cigarette smoking. However, there is clear evidence that female prevalence is increasing in many developing nations, threatening the health of women and their families.
- Successful implementation of tobacco control strategies is informed by scientific evidence. However, a major obstacle to tobacco control in the developing world is the lack of capacity for local surveillance, research, and evaluation.
- Globalization of the tobacco epidemic points to the need for coordinated global health efforts and collaboration between researchers from high income countries and their counterparts in low- and middle-income countries.
- To meet the challenge of diseases caused by tobacco use, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) supports international research aimed at preventing and controlling tobacco use across the globe.
- The International Tobacco and Health Research and Capacity Building Program addresses the critical role of research in reducing the burden of tobacco consumption in low- and middle-income countries and the need to generate a solid evidence base that can inform effective local tobacco control strategies and policies. The program is increasing global capacity to address the epidemic of tobacco use by supporting epidemiological and behavioral research, as well as prevention, treatment, communications, health services and policy research.

Tomorrow

By training the next generation of scientists, forging research partnerships, and creating a global network of scientists, NIH will continue to make an important contribution to global tobacco control efforts. NIH will support research that addresses the burden of tobacco consumption and builds capacity in low- and middle-income regions. These projects will involve:

- Observational, intervention and policy research at the local level will enable the development of country- and context-specific program and policy interventions.
- Developing a greater understanding of cultural and environmental factors that promote tobacco use in low resource settings abroad, which might be applicable to ethnically and economically diverse settings in the United States
- Promoting international cooperation between investigators in the United States and scientists in other countries to conduct research and create a network that facilitates exchange of information and a way for scientists to share best practices, strategies and lessons learned across borders.

Contact: Karen Hofman hofmank@mail.nih.gov
301-496-1491