

Tobacco Use in 3 billion individuals from 16 countries: an analysis of nationally representative cross-sectional household surveys

Lancet Highlights

Research methodology

Nationally representative household surveys of individuals aged 15 years and older were conducted during 2008 – 2010 in 14 low-and middle income countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Mexico, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, and Vietnam) to estimate 15 indicators of tobacco use in the first wave of the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS). We compared weighted point estimates and 95% confidence intervals of tobacco use in the GATS countries with estimates from the 2008 UK General Household Survey and the 2006/2007 US Tobacco Use Supplement to the Current Population Survey. Altogether, approximately 3 billion people aged 15 years and older live in these countries, which represent approximately 60% of the world's population of people aged 15 years and older.

Research findings

- Overall, in the 14 GATS countries:
 - 48.6% of men (ranging from 22.0% in Brazil to 60.6% in Russia) and 11.3% of women (ranging from 0.6% in Egypt to 28.7% in Bangladesh) used tobacco;
 - 40.7% of men (ranging from 21.6% in Brazil to 60.2% in Russia) and 5.0% of women (ranging from 0.5% in Egypt to 24.4% in Poland) smoked a tobacco product.
- Smoking prevalences among men in the UK (22.8%) and the USA (24.0%) were among the lowest reported; smoking prevalences among women in the UK (20.6%) and the USA (16.2%) were among the highest reported.
- In all 16 countries (the 14 GATS countries plus the UK and USA), there were:
 - 852 million tobacco users, made up of 661 million smokers and 247 million smokeless tobacco users (56 million people both smoked and used smokeless tobacco); (NOTE: the WHO estimates that there are 1 billion smokers in the world – so approximately 66.1% of the world's smokers are represented in these surveys)
 - 572 million cigarette smokers, of whom 542 million smoked manufactured cigarettes
 - Manufactured cigarettes were favored by 82% of smokers and 64% of tobacco users.
 - China had the most tobacco users (300.8 million) followed by India (274.9 million); China had the most smokers (300.7 million) and India had the most smokeless tobacco users (205.9 million).
- In many countries, the age of initiation of daily smoking among women seems to have become as young as it is in men. For individuals who had ever smoked daily, women aged 55-64 years at the time of the survey began smoking at an older age (ranging from 20 to 30 years old) than did equivalently aged men (ranging from 17 to 24 years old). However, those who had ever smoked daily and were aged 25-34 years when surveyed started to smoke at much the same age in both sexes (ranging from 16 to 20 years old).
- Age-standardized quit ratios (the percentage of people who had ever smoked daily who no longer smoke) were very low (< 20% in China, India, Russia, Bangladesh, and Egypt). In countries where tobacco control policies are more common, such as Uruguay and Brazil, age-standardized quit ratios were higher (> 35%). Age-standardized quit ratios in the US and UK, where tobacco control efforts have been in place for many years, were > 40%.

Why these findings are important and how they will be used

This is the largest (in terms of the number of people represented and the number of indicators on which data are presented) tobacco use prevalence study ever reported in the scientific literature. It comes at a time when many nations are debating key policy initiatives. This report and the accompanying commentary by Jeff Koplan and Judith Mackay call for stronger implementation of policies that will decrease initiation, promote quitting, and protect nonsmokers from the toxic and cancer-causing chemicals in tobacco smoke pollution. According to lead author Gary Giovino, "Governments around the world need to start giving economic and regulatory advantage to agricultural products that promote health instead of to products like tobacco that kill people."

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