



Preventing Nonsmokers from Being Exposed to Secondhand Smoke: Global Perspective

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How to cite this article: Shrivastava SR, Shrivastava PS, Ramasamy J. Preventing nonsmokers from being exposed to secondhand smoke: Global perspective. *Int J Prev Med* 2016;7:78.

DEAR EDITOR,

Globally, tobacco kills half of its users accounting for close to 6 million deaths each year, of which more than 80% occur due to direct tobacco consumption whereas another 0.6 million nonsmokers die due to exposure to secondhand smoke.^[1] Furthermore, almost four-fifths of the world's smoker are from low- and middle-income nations, which are already struggling to meet the welfare needs of the general population.^[1]

Secondhand smoke is the smoke which is produced when people burn tobacco products that fill enclosed spaces and is a constant threat to the health of people (cancers, ischemic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, etc.) occupying the room, predominantly due to the 250 chemicals which are known to be harmful.^[1,2] Even though the menace of secondhand smoke is universal, quite higher estimates have been obtained in the European region.^[3]

Further, despite the recommendations made under the World Health Organization framework convention for tobacco control, which advocates that every individual is entitled to breathing tobacco smoke-free air, most of the nations have failed to implement the suggested measures.^[1,4] In fact, though surveillance is a key to assess the extent of the tobacco epidemic and reform existing policies, only one of every three nations has a mechanism to monitor tobacco usage through periodic nationwide youth and adult surveys.^[1,4] In addition, many nations are falling short in their commitment to ratify the convention, or raise tax on tobacco products, introduce laws on smoke-free public places, offer cessation programs, prohibition of advertisement or promotion of tobacco products, and even pictorial warnings on packaging.^[1,4]

However, the good thing is that the momentum is growing, and in the last few years, improvement has been observed across different nations.^[3,4] Nevertheless, as no safe limits of exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke have been defined, practically comprehensive smoke-free laws remain the only effective tool to negate the smoking-associated risks.^[1] In fact, significant improvement has been observed among nations regarding outcome wherever laws have been implemented stringently.^[3] Further, these laws have numerous other merits as well, namely, protection of employees from exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke in workplaces and public places, reduction in the prevalence of smoking and associated morbidities, alterations in the attitude of people, and even enhances the revenue generated by imposing a tax.^[3,4]

To conclude, secondhand smoke does cast a massive impact on the health standards of people universally. However, a lot needs to be done to ensure that tobacco becomes a thing of the past for the future generations.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Received: 08 Jan 16 **Accepted:** 24 Apr 16

Published: 01 Jun 16

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Access this article online	
Quick Response Code: 	Website: www.ijpvmjournal.net/www.ijpm.ir
	DOI: 10.4103/2008-7802.183377

