

Light of Women Working for Tobacco Industry



- A large number of women are engaged as unorganized labour in tobacco industry. There are approximately over 4 million women bidi rollers, 2 millions tendu leaf pluckers in India. Tobacco farming involves a huge number of women labour in the fields.
- Women working as tobacco workers suffer from numerous health hazards and various kinds of exploitation from the employers.
- Tobacco workers are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty, exploitation and helplessness. Low wages, poor returns, lack of alternatives and exploitation at the hands of middlemen keep them in perpetual poverty and debt.
- Acute poverty forces these vulnerable women to accept this highly exploitative job and get caught in a vicious cycle of misery and poor health.
- Bidi rollers handle tobacco flakes and inhale tobacco dust as well as volatile components of

tobacco which put them at a high risk of cancer, chronic lung diseases, tuberculosis, asthma, eye problems, pains in neck and back, gynecological problems.

- After working for more than 12 hours, these women workers get as low as Rs. 23 for rolling 1000 bidis.



Protect women from Tobacco Use & Tobacco Marketing



Pictorial health warnings inform about the health harms of tobacco use

- From December 1, 2010, a new graphic health warning showing mouth cancer will be placed on the front panel of all tobacco packs.
- The pictorial health warning will serve to educate women about the dangers associated with tobacco consumption, especially smokeless tobacco.
- Pictorial health warnings are critical for prevention of the growing use of tobacco by women by raising awareness about the health impact of tobaccos use through strong picture images.
- Pictorial health warnings will discourage potential women tobacco users from taking up this deadly addictive product.



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Women and Tobacco

Tobacco use is a critical health concern for women. Globally, tobacco use could kill one billion people during this century. Recognizing the importance of reducing tobacco use among women, and acting upon that recognition, would save many lives. In India, approximately 1 million Indians die annually from tobacco-related diseases.

Controlling the epidemic of tobacco among women is an important part of any comprehensive tobacco control strategy. World No Tobacco Day 2010 gives due recognition to the importance of controlling the epidemic of tobacco among women. In the WHO report "Women and Health: today's evidence, tomorrow's agenda," Director-General of WHO, Margaret Chan wrote "protecting and promoting the health of women is crucial to health and development – not only for the citizens of today but also for those of future generations".



Global Scenario

- Globally there are more than 1 billion smokers of which about 20% , i.e., 250 million are women smokers.
- The epidemic of tobacco use among women is increasing globally.
- The new WHO report, *Women and health: today's evidence, tomorrow's agenda*, points to evidence that tobacco advertising increasingly targets girls.
- As per the Global Youth Tobacco Survey 2009, the prevalence of tobacco use among 13-15 year old school children is 14.6% with 19% boys and 8.3% girls consuming tobacco in some form



Why is it important to control tobacco use among women?

- Tobacco use negatively affects the health of women and the economy by diverting household resources that would otherwise be spent on food and other basic necessities.
- Women smokers have a higher relative risk of developing cardiovascular disease than men.
- Women who smoke are twice as likely to suffer a heart attack as non-smoking women.
- Nonsmoking women still suffer increased risk of heart disease from exposure to secondhand smoke of their husbands or partners.
- The risk of developing lung cancer is 13 times higher for current women smokers compared to lifelong non-smokers.
- Women smokers have an increased risk of cervical cancer. Smoking is a known cause of cancer of the lung, larynx, mouth cancer, oral cavity, bladder, pancreas, uterus, cervix, kidney, stomach and esophagus.
- Smokeless tobacco which causes oral cancer, mouth cancer, pancreatic cancer and increases risk of blood pressure, is consumed by a huge number of women.



Tobacco use and adverse reproductive outcome

- Consumption of smokeless tobacco during pregnancy decreases gestational age at birth and decreases birth weight.
- Smoking reduces a woman's fertility. Women smokers tend to take longer to conceive than women nonsmokers.
- Research studies have found that smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke among pregnant women is a major cause of spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) after birth.



Indian Scenario

- According to NFHS-3 data, 11% (over 54 million women) use some form of tobacco, out of which only 1.6% are smokers and rest are tobacco chewers.
- As per NFHS-3 over 8.5% (2 million) of ante-natal mothers in India are tobacco users.
- The vast majority of women who consume tobacco use smokeless forms (i.e., gutkha, paan masala with tobacco, mishri, gul) and it varies considerably across states with prevalence rates from 1% to as high as 60% in some of the North-Eastern states.
- Tobacco use is more prevalent among the illiterate.
- The Global Youth Tobacco Survey 2009, found that 8.3% of girls (ages 13-15 years) reported consuming some form of tobacco; 2.4% reported consuming cigarettes; and 7.2 % reported consuming tobacco products other than cigarettes.
- Women, more commonly in lower socio-economic groups, apply tobacco paste and powder to the teeth and gums, often for the purpose of cleaning the teeth. Users then tend to hold it in their mouths, due to the nicotine addiction. Gudhaku, Mishri, Gul, Bajjar and a variety of tobacco-based toothpastes and toothpowders are predominantly used by women from different parts of India.



- Women who use oral contraceptives should avoid smoking as this raises the risk of having a heart attack, 40 times more than non-smokers.
- There is a clear relationship between the number of cigarettes smoked during pregnancy and low birth weight babies.
- Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke during pregnancy increase the risk of health and behavioral problems including: abnormal blood pressure in infants and children, cleft palates and lips, childhood leukemia, infantile colic, childhood wheezing, respiratory disorders in childhood, eye problems during childhood, mental retardation, attention deficit disorder, behavioral problems and other learning and developmental problems.

