

TOBACCO USE AND CESSATION: CHINA

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Overview

China is both the world's leading producer and consumer of cigarettes.¹ It is estimated that by 2025, lung cancer will kill 1 million Chinese per year.¹

In 2011, the Chinese tobacco industry grossed over \$119.5 billion in tax and profits and over \$95.2 billion as revenue to the state.¹ There are 1.7 trillion cigarettes produced in China each year.¹ Government profits from the tobacco industry give them little incentive to ban tobacco. The State Tobacco Monopoly Administration or STMA is accountable for overseeing China's tobacco industry as well as establishing regulations promoting the awareness and dangers of tobacco and smoking.¹

Although tobacco use is a significant public health challenge in China, there are few tobacco cessation programs available to the public and even fewer offered in the workplace. China is slowly taking steps toward promoting national tobacco cessation. New legislation effective May 1, 2011 made all indoor public spaces smoke free, although there are no penalties for violations.² Anti-smoking policies and regulations are slowly making its way by "green development" and environmental awareness.¹ However, "anti-smoking policies have historically been little more than window-dressing" because of lack of enforcement by the STMA.¹

Prevalence of Tobacco Use

In China alone, there are about 350 million smokers which equates to "one-third of the world's smokers."¹ According to the North-South Lung Cancer summit, "the number of deaths from lung cancer in China has increased by 465% over the past 30 years."³

Tobacco use is much more common among men than women.

- 53% of men use tobacco.⁴
- 2% of women use tobacco.⁴

This gender gap is because Chinese women who smoke are culturally stigmatized. Women who smoke are thought to have bad morals.

Children in China are beginning to smoke at ever younger ages. A Peking University survey of over 100,000 students revealed that middle school smokers (on average) took their first puff before age 11.⁵ Among 13- to 15-year-olds, 7.1% of boys and 4.1% of girls use tobacco.⁶ According to a study, "more than eight of every ten 5 and 6 year olds that were included in this study could recognize at least one cigarette brand."⁷

Smoking is a dominant and important social activity in daily Chinese life. Many believe that "a cigarette after a meal makes you happier than gods in heaven."⁵ Boxes of cigarettes are common gifts for friends, family, professors and people in government jobs.⁵ To decline a cigarette in such circumstances is seen as socially inappropriate.⁵

Smokeless tobacco is commonly used in China, particularly among youth. Common types of smokeless tobacco in China include:⁵

- Gutkha
- Nass
- Pan masala

Cost of Tobacco Use

In 2010, smoking cost China U.S.\$22.7 billion.⁴ This is equivalent to 1.9% of China's gross domestic product (GDP).⁴ About U.S.\$1.7 billion was spent on direct health care costs, 3.1% of total health care expenditures.⁴ The remaining U.S.\$21 billion were for indirect costs (e.g., lost productivity).⁴

Tobacco-Related Health Information

About 3,000 people die every day in China from smoking-related illnesses, translating into over 1 million deaths per year.⁴ The death toll will double to 2 million per year by 2020 if current trends continue.⁴ By 2030, one-third of all male deaths will be from smoking-related diseases.⁴

Over two-thirds of all deaths related to smoking in China are attributed to lung cancer, pulmonary tuberculosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).⁸ It is estimated that 25 million people die each year from COPD in China, of which 72% are smokers.⁸ By the year 2030, years of productive life lost due to cardiovascular disease (CVD) will increase by 57%.⁹

Tobacco Use in the Workplace

The largest cigarette manufacturer monopoly in the world is in China.¹ As a result, the tobacco industry influences China's health policies. Even so, the Chinese government banned smoking in all indoor public spaces in 2011.² The legislation does not include specific penalties for smoking in these areas and excludes offices and government workplaces.²

Although tobacco use is a public health challenge in China, few tobacco cessation programs are available for the public or in the workplace. The Chinese government is beginning to implement laws and policies to reduce tobacco use. These include smoking bans and cigarette warning labels.

- In 2011, China banned smoking in indoor public places, although there are no penalties for violating the ban.²
- The city of Hong Kong banned smoking in restaurants, workplaces, schools and public parks in 2007. People who violate the law could pay up to a U.S.\$644 fine.¹⁰

- At the end of 2007, all cigarette manufacturers were required to put mandatory new images on their packages illustrating the impact of smoking (e.g., cancerous lung and diseased gums).¹¹
- In 2005, China ratified the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Treaty.²

Tobacco Cessation Treatment Options

Although smoking cessation programs are not widely available nor promoted there are various treatment options available to smokers.⁶ Medications are available to those who want to quit. Bupropion SR (trade name Wellbutrin® and Zyban®) is available with a prescription, and nicotine patches and replacement drugs are available and growing in popularity.⁶ However, cost may be a deterrent to use. Many customers with tight budgets look online for cheaper alternatives. As counterfeit drugs are a major problem in China, consumers should be wary.¹² Counterfeit drugs ineffectively treat symptoms and may be hazardous to the user.¹² In Hong Kong, the Hospital Authority Smoking Counseling and Cessation Centres (16 total) provide smoking cessation programs, including counseling by health care professionals, nicotine replacement therapy and cessation services.¹³ These centers also provide information and support for smoker's family and friends.¹³

Impact of World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)

Using a computer, SimSmoke China, found that a “high intensity tobacco control campaign would lead to a 2.5% relative decline in smoking rates by 2015 and prevent 1,080,000 smoking attributable deaths by 2050.”¹⁴ Programs such as increased taxes, smoke-free air laws and restrictions on target marketing are mentioned in MPOWER which will reduce smoking.¹⁴ Using MPOWER programs, the SimSmoke model “projected 494,000 fewer smoking attributable deaths by 2050.”¹⁴

Resources

- [The Hospital Authority Smoking Counseling and Cessation Centres](#) (Hong Kong)
- [WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2008](#)
- [WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2009](#)
- [Chinese Association on Tobacco Control](#)
- [Tobacco Control Office, Chinese Department of Health](#)
- [MPOWER](#)

Citations

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