

GO UP IN SMOKE

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“Aspiration for gender equality is leading women to narrow the gender gap” this statement creates euphoria until discussed in the context of smoking. Casual and social smoking is on the rise among the elite women in metropolitan cities across India. According to a global tobacco study in 2016-17, the number of women smokers in India has risen by 2.3 percent from 5.3 million in 1980 to 12.7 million in 2012. As per a GATS survey (2009-10), out of 15% adults who smoke cigarettes, almost 3% are females. This raises a number of questions as to why women even after acknowledging the health risks and dire consequences adopt smoking; is it a personal choice or is to assert independence and break stereotypes existing in the society that question her morality and modesty.



A survey conducted in D Y Patil University, Navi Mumbai, 2017 published in Ind. J. Youth Adol. Health 2017; among 1000 female students showed some alarming results regarding the trend of smoking. Information was gathered on the prevalence of smoking, their knowledge on the ill effects of smoking on health, and the influence of family members' smoking habits. It was known that 13% smoked cigarettes while 87% subjects did not smoke cigarettes.

The study concludes that the prevalence of smoking amongst girls varies in different subject streams and that family and friends have a great influence on individuals' perception to smoking. Extensive health education programs are needed to educate young women on the health hazards of smoking and constant support is required to help them quit smoking. Also, the factors that may be considered for initiation of smoking were peer influence, curiosity and stress. Many studies suggest rapidly changing attitude and evolving social norms offer opportunities and liberty to express themselves.

Female smoking has enormous consequences not only on women's health, and economic wellbeing, but also on their families. The health effects of smoking for women are more serious than for men. In addition to the general health risks common to both genders, women face additional hazards in pregnancy, female-specific cancers, such as cancer of the cervix, and increased cardiovascular risks. In India, the trend regarding smoking among girls is already on the rise in some areas. The spending power of girls and women is increasing making cigarettes more affordable. The social and cultural constraints that previously prevented many women from smoking are weakening, and women specific health education and tobacco quitting programmes are rare. Further, the tobacco companies have a huge market in terms of women by offering light, mild, and menthol cigarettes, and featuring advertisements directed at women.

The greatest challenge and opportunity in preventive health in India is to avert the predicted rise of smoking among women.

The road to closing the gender gap, break the glass ceiling and becoming inspiring role models for the younger generation is our responsibility and commitment and should be thought through carefully when it comes to pursuing equality goals. Our fight will go on for decades when it comes to accessing equal opportunities, however it is best to avoid some addictions and present the best version of ourselves for a better & healthier future.