

Reinforcing Tobacco Control Policy for Women and Adolescent: Now More than Ever

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Tobacco Control Policy vs. Tobacco Companies Strategy

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends enforcement of tobacco control as a top-priority public health policy issue in illness prevention [1]. Smoking is one of the most powerful risk factors affecting health; it can lead to disease and death, is a cause of many illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, respiratory infections, etc. [2]; around 6 million people die each year due to smoking [1]. Moreover, smoking causes diverse and serious direct and indirect social burdens. Worldwide, 168 countries have signed the 2005 Framework Convention Alliance for Tobacco Control (FCTC) to enforce policies for tobacco control and to reduce smoking rates, and this is the very first convention in the field of health.

On the other hand, tobacco companies are developing various strategies to secure new customers to reverse today's trend of unfavourable attitudes toward smoking. In particular, they are targeting women and the young in an effort to secure new customers. The feministic marketing strategy of stressing smoking as a symbol of progressive women's rights is a well-known strategy used by the tobacco companies. Furthermore, fruity, minty, chocolate-scented and flavoured tobacco is another strategy to attract women and adolescent customers.

Many countries control the direct advertising of tobacco, and tobacco companies are making efforts to encourage favourable attitudes toward their image through corporate social responsibility tactics such as fellowship programs and charity work. Such activities are also known to have a positive impact on smoking behaviour [3,4]. The marketing costs for tobacco companies are currently known to be about \$10 billion a year [5] and much of the expenditure is to lure new smokers. The nicotine in tobacco is a highly addictive substance and once someone starts smoking, it is very difficult to quit. Thus, if the tobacco company's marketing can lead to even just a small increase in smoking, they would be able to create a new customer base with high loyalty.

Reason of the Reinforcing Tobacco Control Policy for Women and Adolescent

In public policy, resources get distributed based on evidence such as statistical data, and priorities must be set. Moreover, in most cases, policies need to consider cost effectiveness as well; therefore, women and adolescent smokers, who form a comparatively small section of the population, are inevitably excluded from the policy's target population. However, there are a number of important reasons why tobacco control policies for women and adolescents must be strengthened. First, the female and adolescent smoker population is far larger than the official statistics indicate. Smokers may answer falsely on whether or not they smoke for many reasons. This stems from social desirability, which is a much more significant factor for women and adolescents, and the underestimation of the smoking rate has been proven many times in the scientific literature [6-8]. Second, women and adolescents are biologically more prone than male adults are to harmful impacts from smoking. Females are more vulnerable to smoking than males [9-11]

not only in terms of their own health but in terms of the enormous threat to their fertility as well [2,12]. In particular, since it is highly likely that women will continue smoking even after pregnancy [13], female smoking should be handled as a priority from a maternal-child health point of view. For adolescents, their bodies have not yet completely matured and damage to their health from smoking so early on may have serious consequences [5,14]. If the current smoking trends continue, it is predicted that there will be around 5.6 million premature deaths this century due to illnesses related to smoking (based on evidence from American children) [15]. Adolescent smoking extends into adulthood, so a tobacco control policy for adolescents should be a main strategy in reducing the smoking population. Lastly, as many of the tobacco companies' main strategies to secure market share are aimed at women and adolescents, countries must come up with active countermeasures. Generally, the female and adolescent smoking rate is lower than that of male adults. However, the smoker population in male adults is continuously declining, whereas there is a smaller or no decline in the female and adolescent smoking rates, leading to a smaller gap between those populations [15-17].

Policy Implication

Tobacco control is one of the simplest and most efficient ways to improve the health of humanity. Tobacco control policy can be divided into: 1) Tobacco taxation, 2) Bans on advertising, promotion and sponsorship, 3) Smoke-free environments, 4) Health warnings on tobacco packaging, 5) Treatment of tobacco dependence [15]. These are comprehensive policies for a reduction of the smoking population, but a comparatively more effective method for women and adolescents. Moreover, smoking prevention also has a double effect in encouraging people to quit smoking. Strengthening legal regulations is an effective method that is also comprehensive in countering the marketing strategies of tobacco companies trying to attract women and adolescents as new customers, and must be done through mutual worldwide cooperation. Moreover, support for smokers to quit smoking should also be strengthened. Though there may be regional and cultural differences for women and adolescents, it should be borne in mind that there are more women and adolescent smokers than the official statistics show. Thus, for females and adolescents, there should be an enforcement of more active policies to find the hidden smokers and support a tobacco control policy.

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