**Smoking a global health concern**

[Chaudhry Sultan Mehmood](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/chaudhry-sultan-mehmood/)

May 26, 2023

Smoking is a global public health concern that affects individuals, families, and societies. In recent years, there has been a concerning rise in the number of women smokers in Pakistan, with over 7 percent of women being daily smokers, reports Capital Calling, a network of academic researchers and professionals. It reports that the highest proportion of female smokers in Pakistan resides in rural areas (10%) and are less educated (12%).

19.5 percent of women smokers age from 25 to 29 years. Sindh has 34% of women smokers. 58.5 percent of women smokers lives in rural areas and 71.7 percent are illiterate. 33.1 percent are very poor and 78.6 percent are unemployed. 94.5 percent of women smokers are married or divorced. 52.7 percent of women smokers have gone through domestic violence at a stage.

The network reports that smoking exposes women to numerous health risks, including lung cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and respiratory infections. These conditions significantly diminish the quality of life and can lead to premature death.

Smoking has adverse effects on women’s reproductive health. It can lead to fertility issues, complications during pregnancy such as premature birth, low birth weight, and developmental problems in infants. Moreover, maternal smoking increases the risk of stillbirth and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Women smokers not only harm themselves but also put their families and children at risk through exposure to secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke is associated with various respiratory problems, including asthma, bronchitis, and ear infections in children.

The rise in women smokers in Pakistan imposes a significant burden on the healthcare system. Treating smoking-related diseases requires substantial resources, including medical facilities, medications, and healthcare professionals. The increased demand for healthcare services strains the already limited healthcare infrastructure and budget. Smoking-related illnesses often lead to reduced productivity, absenteeism, and increased healthcare costs for employers. Women smokers who fall ill or require extended treatment may be unable to fulfill their professional responsibilities, leading to reduced work efficiency and economic losses for businesses.

Spending on tobacco products diverts resources that could be used for more productive purposes. The money spent on smoking not only harms individual finances but also affects the overall economy. It reduces household savings and limits investment opportunities that could stimulate economic growth.

The government should enact and enforce stricter tobacco control policies, including higher taxes on tobacco products, graphic health warnings on packaging, and comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship. These measures can discourage smoking initiation and encourage current smokers to quit.

*The writer is a freelance communist based in Multan.*