



# Girls and boys for change: tobacco control now



## The effect of men's tobacco use on women

### **Men's tobacco use**

The majority (around 80%) of the world's smokers are currently men. The Eastern Mediterranean Region has some of the highest rates of adult male tobacco use, including 61% in Lebanon, 62% in the Syrian Arab Republic and 53% in Tunisia. Tobacco use among young boys (age 13–15) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region has also reached alarming levels in many countries.

In many cultures tobacco use marks a transition to manhood and is part of men's socializing together. Tobacco marketing also targets men by associating smoking with manliness, sport, health, attractiveness, success and wealth.

Like women, male smokers have increased risk for lung and other cancers, coronary heart disease, chronic bronchitis and emphysema, and osteoporosis. Tobacco use also has a negative impact on male fertility and sexual potency.

### **The impact of men's tobacco use on women and children**

As the majority of smokers, men are largely responsible for women's exposure to second-hand smoke in the home and in the workplace. Women can often find it hard to negotiate smoke-free space, even within their own homes.

Men's tobacco use diverts household income that could be spent on food, education and health care, with negative effects on families, especially poor ones. The economic costs of the death, illness and disability of a male head of household due to tobacco use are high and affect women and children. The loss of earnings and the costs of health care can be a serious burden for women to cope with. They can find it harder to gain employment and often earn less than men. Women are also usually the main caregivers to men with tobacco-related illnesses.

### **Men's role in fighting the tobacco epidemic**

Men have important roles and responsibilities to protect their families and co-workers from the harmful effects of tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke. These include:

- As family members and workers, they can protect their families and co-workers by avoiding smoking in the home and the workplace.
- As fathers, they can protect the health of foetuses, infants and children from their second-hand smoke.
- As husbands, they can encourage their pregnant wives to quit and remain tobacco-free.
- As the main earners in many households, they can protect their families from the economic burden of tobacco-related death and illness by quitting. This also ensures that income that could be spent on necessities, such as clothing, food and education, is not spent on tobacco products instead.
- As politicians, religious leaders, teachers, media leaders, businessmen and health care providers, among others, they can provide positive role models by not using tobacco and encouraging others not to do so.

