

Today, on 28 January 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt's Ministry of Health and Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics launch important findings from the largest tobacco use monitoring survey ever conducted among adults in Egypt. This survey was conducted in 2009 in all of Egypt's governorates, covering both males and females, aged 15 years and older, in a total sample size of 23 760. The implementation of the survey was a collaborative effort between the WHO Representative's Office in Egypt, the Ministry of Health and the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics.

One of the key findings revealed by the survey is that 38% of Egyptian males use some form of tobacco product. Of this percentage, nearly 32% smoke cigarettes, about 6% smoke shisha and almost 5% chew tobacco.

The survey also revealed that the majority of Egyptian males who use any tobacco product belong to groups who either have no formal education or have some primary level education (approximately 52% and 50%, respectively).

Tobacco use constitutes a serious health burden on Egyptian society, and also on the health system, due to the cost of providing health care for smokers.

The Global Adult Tobacco Survey revealed an unexpectedly high rate of usage of smokeless tobacco, which had not previously been identified as a public health concern in Egypt. Usage of 'chewed' tobacco was shown to be as high as 5% among males and 0.3% among females. Contrary to popular belief, the survey found that adults consuming smokeless tobacco do so on a daily basis.

According to the survey, 0.6% of the Egyptian female population use some form of tobacco product. Of this percentage, 0.2% smoke cigarettes, 0.3% smoke shisha and 0.3% chew tobacco.

The survey also revealed that the majority of Egyptian females who use any tobacco product belong to groups who either have no formal education or have some primary level education (both 1.1%).

The survey showed that male cigarette smokers smoke an average of one pack a day while females smoke on average half a pack a day. 88% of current cigarette smokers smoke local brands.

Smoking in public places in Egypt is a serious public health threat. Exposure to second-hand smoke results in serious hazards related to both health and the environment. It is estimated that

more than 70% of people are exposed to second-hand smoke in restaurants while about 49% are exposed to second-hand smoke in health care facilities.

Despite the fact that anti-tobacco laws in Egypt strictly prohibit smoking in public places, adherence is weak. Implementation, enforcement and compliance with these laws are important issues that need to be addressed at national level to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke, and thus the health risks associated with it.

One of the most important results of the survey relates to the economic cost of tobacco consumption which amounts to approximately 6% of the average monthly income of the Egyptian family.

This survey paves the way for the implementation of strong evidence-based policies targeted at all facets of the tobacco problem at the national level in Egypt, such as second-hand smoking and chewed tobacco, and for the implementation and enforcement of anti-tobacco legislation. Additional efforts must be exerted to target groups where there are high levels of tobacco consumption, such as males in the age group of 25–44 years, among whom the rate of tobacco consumption is around 46%.

It is also apparent that tobacco industry campaigns in Egypt have focused on the link between smoking and urbanization among Egyptian females based on the increase seen in tobacco consumption among female university graduates. This specific situation, in turn, needs to be

addressed through a comprehensive multi-sectoral approach.

The Global Adult Tobacco Survey was conducted in 14 countries as follows: Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Mexico, Poland, Philippines, Russian Federation and Ukraine, Thailand, Turkey, Uruguay and Vietnam. Egypt is the sixth country to launch the survey data. It is hoped that the Global Adult Tobacco Survey will be conducted periodically in Egypt to obtain comparable evidence-based data which will facilitate the evaluation of tobacco control activities as well as help compile a complete file on the tobacco epidemic in Egypt.

For more information, please visit the Tobacco Free Initiative:

www.emro.who.int/tfi/tfi.htm

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