

Women are catching up with men in every field and even surpassing them in some. Today, women have outperformed men in many fields and one of them is the consumption of tobacco.

According to various studies, India now has around 12.1 million women smokers and lags behind the United States in this segment. While the average male smokes 6.1 cigarettes a day, a woman smokes an average of 7 cigarettes per day!

Moreover, rural women consume tobacco in various forms — dental paste, bidis, hookah and masher powder which they rub on their teeth and inside of the mouth in order to energise them to work in the fields, manage their household chores and other works.



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Second-hand smoke: Second-hand smoke is a mixture of sidestream and mainstream smoke. The smoke which comes from the burning end of a cigarette is termed as sidestream smoke and the smoke that is exhaled by the smoker is termed as mainstream smoke.

Being exposed to second-hand smoke affects an adult's heart and blood vessels directly. Adult non-smokers, who live with smokers, are at about 25 per cent more risk of developing a heart disease. While sidestream smoke makes up about 85 per cent of second-hand smoke which consists of different chemicals than exhaled in mainstream smoke. It burns at a lower temperature, and the burn is not clean or complete. Hence, this may result to the possibility of developing **lung cancer** even in the non-smokers.

Risks of second-hand smoke during pregnancy: Smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke during pregnancy increases the risk of health and behavioural problems in the newborns, which includes: abnormal blood pressure in infants and children, cleft palate and lip, leukaemia, infantile colic, childhood wheezing, respiratory disorders, eye problems, mental retardation, attention deficit disorder, behavioural problems and other learning and developmental problems in the affected children.

Negative effects of second-hand smoke: Exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke can cause serious and fatal diseases in adults as well as children. Research studies have found that smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke among pregnant women is a significant cause of miscarriages and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) after birth.

Infants of mothers who smoke during and after pregnancy are 3 to 4 times more likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) than babies of non-smoking mothers. This indicates that there is a direct impact of tobacco on the infant mortality rate.

Effects of second-hand smoke on fertility: Research has revealed that smoking causes infertility as it harms the eggs in women and sperms in men. Consumption of smokeless tobacco during

pregnancy leads to premature deliveries and also prevents the babies from growing optimally whilst in the mothers' wombs.

Third-hand smoking: Children are more sensitive to being exposed to third-hand smoke because they breathe, crawl on, play on, touch, and even taste (because they often put their hands in their mouths) floors contaminated with tobacco residue. Hence, second-hand smoke and third-hand smoke are equally dangerous.

As they contain more than 7000 chemicals, of which hundreds are harmful and about 70 can cause **cancer**. This shows that there is an urgency to control tobacco consumption and the target population must include: adolescent girls, pregnant women, and older women.

According to Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS), India has an alarmingly high rate of tobacco consumption. Almost 275 million Indian adults, i.e., nearly 35 per cent of the population, consumes some or the other form of tobacco.

GATS findings related to tobacco use among women are:

3 per cent of adult women use tobacco products

Over 90 per cent women tobacco users consume smokeless tobacco (a large number of these users are in the reproductive age group)

The average age at initiation of tobacco use was 17.8 years with 25.8 per cent of females starting tobacco use before the age of 15

Apart from the cigarette, smokeless tobacco can also be dangerous. It is a form of tobacco which is consumed without burning, it is consumed by chewing. Most people chew or suck (dip) the tobacco in their mouth and spit out the tobacco juices that build up.

Maternal health effects of smoking

Impaired **lactation**

Miscarriage

Premature birth

Ectopic pregnancy

Placental abnormalities

Bleeding

Premature rupture of membranes

Smoking also adversely affects the foetus which can be dangerous, as it may lead to foetal growth retardation