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# India's poor smoke more than rich, says WHO survey

DHNS

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Socio-economic milieu also has a bearing on the smoking habit as poor men in India smoke more than the rich, says a recent study.

The World Health Survey (WHS) conducted by the WHO has found that 46.7 per cent of the poor men smoke in India as against 21.8 per cent of the rich men.

The study, released here by as part of the anti-tobacco campaign, found that 35.3 per cent of men and 7.6 per cent of women smoke in India, which finds classification as a low-income group country in the study.

Corroborating the finding, an expert from the Regional Cancer Centre (RCC) here said his experience has been that most of the patients coming to the hospital for tobacco-related problems hailed from poor family background.

Dr R Jayakrishnan, Assistant Professor, Community Oncology Division, RCC, said: "A majority of tobacco-induced cancer patients who visit RCC are from the lower income strata. The need of the hour is to develop prevention strategies specifically focusing on the more vulnerable sections."

The study also revealed that over a quarter of the country's population is under the addictive spell of tobacco.

The study was initiated in the context of reports that the risk of dying from smoking was significantly higher in the lower socio-economic groups as compared to affluent sections.

A total of 2,13,807 men and women of 48 low and middle income countries were covered in the survey, which compared the magnitude of within-country variation of smoking according to wealth.

Economist M A Oommen commented on the finding, "While linking high incidence of smoking with poverty is a simplistic correlation, the issue has to be tackled in a multi-pronged manner such as giving incentives to the poor to get out of the habit, moral persuasion, higher excise duty on tobacco products, expanding capability building of the poor and structural reforms through better employment opportunities."

An adult tobacco survey in India done in 2009-10 jointly by the health Ministry and the WHO had found that smokers in India spend an average of Rs 399 on cigarettes and Rs 93 on bidis monthly.

Among Indian women, prevalence of smoking is more than four times among the poorest in comparison with the rich.

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