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Tobacco consumption in Egypt: Enough evidence, increasing prevalence

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Background: Tobacco consumption is a global problem with nearly 21% of the global population aged 15 and above smoked tobacco. Egypt is one of the highest countries regarding tobacco consumption, one of the top 10 countries worldwide and the first among the Arab countries. Tobacco is a risk factor of cancer which is estimated to affect 110 cases/100 000 people annually in Egypt.

Findings: National surveys conducted in 2006 and 2009 revealed a very high prevalence among adult male approaching 50% and increasing prevalence among youth. Tobacco smoked not only in the form of cigarettes but also water-pipe smoking (shisha) is rapidly spreading in Egypt particularly among the youth and women particularly with decreasing social stigma and increasing social acceptability of water-pipe smoking in public and social settings. Lack of public awareness and normalization of smoking are also contributing to increasing prevalence among special vulnerable groups such as youth and women heavily targeted by tobacco industry.

Conclusions: Tobacco control should be clearly placed on the top of political agenda, linked to increasing burden of non communicable diseases which are in charge of 80% of the total deaths in Egypt and supported by evidence protocols for enforcement. Otherwise, tobacco use burden will be on the rise killing more Egyptians and wasting national efforts to improve health and development.

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