One of the largest public health opportunities available to governments in the 21st century is to prevent an increase in smoking among women in low- and middle-income countries.

TREND, USA
Estimated smoking prevalence and smoking-attributable mortality:
USA, 1990–2010

TREND, JAPAN
Age-standardized smoking prevalence and lung cancer mortality:
Japan, 1955–2010

IN JAPAN, FEMALE SMOKING HAS NOT FOLLOWED THE GLOBAL EPIDEMIC MODEL.

UNDERREPORTING OF USE
Underreporting of tobacco use among women in South Korea: 2008

UNDERREPORTING LEADS TO UNDERESTIMATION OF IMPACT ON WOMEN
Of 1,620 chemically-verified smokers, 12% of men and 50% of women claimed themselves as non-smokers. In societies such as South Korea, where it is generally not socially acceptable for women to smoke in public, smoking in private may still occur and stay hidden to survey researchers. This underreporting will lead to the underestimation of the impact tobacco use has on women in such societies.

A pproximately 170 million adult women worldwide are daily smokers. Smoking rates in women significantly decreased from 1980 to 2013 in several high-income countries. However, smoking among women is still more common in high-income than in low- and middle-income countries.

Although smokeless tobacco use by South Asian women is relatively common (e.g., Chapter 18, Smokeless Tobacco), female cigarette smoking in most Asian and African countries is uncommon. Furthermore, smoking rates decreased in several Asian and African countries from 1980 to 2013. However, appropriate tobacco control programs must be in place to prevent an increase in smoking rates among women in the future to ensure that low- and middle-income countries will not follow the pattern of the global smoking epidemic. In this model, the male smoking prevalence substantially increased, and over the following 3–5 decades smoking rates increase among women in low-income countries.

The example of Japan shows that this second stage of the epidemic (the increase in female smoking prevalence) is not inevitable.

Tobacco companies attempt to link smoking to women’s rights and gender equality, as well as glamor, sociability, enjoyment, success, and slimness. They use various strategies to promote the social acceptability of smoking in women, including product development (e.g., flavors and aromas), product design (e.g., packs that are more appealing to women), and advertising involvement in social responsibility programs, and using the influence of popular media.

Some people, especially women, smoke in order to lose or control weight. Healthy diet and exercise have shown to be more efficient and less harmful ways to control weight or obesity, with additional benefits beyond weight control alone.

CALL TO ACTION
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