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# 30 MAY

## WHY IT'S TOUGH TO SNUFF THE PUFFING HABIT



Every year, May 31 has been designated as the 'World No Tobacco Day'. Such a designation was made with the aim of taking preventive measures on the habit of smoking, to ensure that the habit is cut at its stem.

The Economist highlighted that the World Health Organisation (WHO) is spearheading this initiative, which runs parallels with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), being part of Goal 3, which is focusing on Good Health and Well-being.

As the world is moving towards the future, priorities need to be given to global sustainable goals, for a world that would need to balance the demands of population growth and the redistribution of resources in a fairer and more equitable manner.

Overall, global smoking rates have fallen. WHO estimated that, only over a fifth of adults smoked in 2015, compared to a quarter ten years earlier.

However, it is still a popular habit. In developing and middle-income countries, there is an increasing, and alarming, trend in tobacco use, as these are where 80% of smokers now live. Some of the countries concerned are:

1. Indonesia, where more than three-quarter of the men smoke.
2. China, more than 50% of smokers are males.
3. African, Latin-American and eastern Mediterranean countries, where the habit is becoming more common and has led to a growing problem.

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death, said Rabin Martin, a consulting firm involved in the promotion of improving health and access to global health technologies. Smoking kills 1 out of 10 people worldwide, said the firm, whose clients include Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Johnson & Johnson and Merck & Co. Young adults form the single group with the highest prevalence of smoking among all other age groups.

Mimi Nichter, an anthropologist at University of Arizona, highlighted the issue of smoking among college students in her book, 'Lighting Up'. She said that 'social smoking' among college students has been on the rise. College students seem to pick up the habit due to these reasons:

1. It seems to facilitate social interaction.
2. It helps the young people to express and explore their identity.
3. It provides means for communicating their state of emotions.

What started out as a 'casual habit' for many would then lead to reluctance to quit. It becomes more difficult as upon graduation, they would be facing uncertainties in job prospects and smoking would continue to provide some sort of 'relief' from stress-related issues. Some would even choose e-cigarettes to remain 'cool' and trendy and to keep up with the times.

Global smoking rates are seeing a downward trend, but simply due to population growth in many parts of the world, the number of smokers has risen. This has also led to an increase of 29% in tobacco sales.

In Malaysia, 22.8% of the population aged 15 and above have become smokers, stated The Star from a 2015 survey.

The Malaysian Government therefore is taking the necessary steps to ensure that the increase is stemmed. Malaysia aspires to reduce the habit to 15% or lower by 2025, and ultimately to be a smoke-free nation by 2045.

Other measures under due consideration include increasing the tobacco tax and the raising of cigarette prices to deter smokers, especially the youths.

Tough it may be, either in kicking the habit or in preventing it from rising among the people, but for the sake of the population's overall well-being, it pays to take the much-needed tough stance, befitting this year's theme, 'Tobacco - A Threat to Development.'

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