

*The Syrian Center for Tobacco Studies is a collaborative research and capacity –building project between University of Memphis, Virginia Commonwealth University (USA), University of Muenster (Germany), and the Syrian Society Against Cancer.*

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## What's New:

- The Research Assistance Matching (RAM) Project is launched [WWW.TOBACCORESEARCH.NET/RAM.HTM](http://WWW.TOBACCORESEARCH.NET/RAM.HTM) by the Syrian Center for Tobacco Studies and Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. RAM is an innovative online programme to facilitate tobacco control research collaboration by connecting researchers and providing them with a platform to share and exchange information. The purpose of the project is to enhance the spread and quality of tobacco control research in developing countries by: helping researchers in such countries to increase their access to the expertise and experience of the international tobacco control research community, and assisting international colleagues to identify potential partners in developing countries.
- SCTS team participated in Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco (SRNT) conference, Prague-Czech 20-23/03/2005 with oral and poster presentations. The participations are:
  - \* Smoking cessation in Syria, a developing country's perspective. (oral) *Taghrid Asfar*
  - \* Characteristic of completers and drop-outs in Syria's first smoking cessation trial. (poster) *Taghrid Asfar, Kenneth Ward, Mark Vander, Fadi Hammal, Thomas Eissenberg, Wasim Maziak*
  - \* Epidemiology of smoking among adults in Aleppo-Syria: The 1<sup>st</sup> population-based estimates. (oral) *Wasim Maziak, Kenneth Ward, Thomas Eissenberg*
  - \* Assessment of the Arabic version of Tiffany-Drobes question naire of smoking urges. (poster) *Rastam S, Maziak W, Ward K.D, Eissenberg T*
  - \* Association between smoking and treatment outcomes in patients with pulmonary tuberculosis in Aleppo, Syria. (poster) *Fouad F, Ward K, Eissenberg T, Rastam S, Maziak W*
  - \* Quitting attitude among water-pipe smokers in Syria. (poster) *Hammal F, Ward K, Eissenberg T, Maziak W*
  - \* Perceptions and attitudes toward anti-smoking advertisements in Syria. (poster) *Hammal F, Ward K, Eissenberg T, Maziak W*
- **Doctors Say No to Smoking:** The Syrian Center for Tobacco Studies together with Aleppo Directorate of Health, Aleppo University, Syrian Society against Cancer has launched the "Doctors Say No to Smoking" campaign. It will involve multi-media (billboards, radio, brochures and flyers) campaign with a comprehensive package of messages and strategies designed to tackle different aspects of the smoking problem, and to encourage doctors to play an active role in combating the smoking epidemic within the society.
- A new study will be conducted by SCTS in primary care setting in Aleppo. The goals of this study are :1) to determine knowledge, attitude, belief, and prevalence related to tobacco use among Syrian primary care physicians and patients; 2) to determine baseline and post-intervention tobacco use practices and policies, as reported by both physicians and patients, and 3) to determine the efficacy of a combined behavioral/pharmacological smoking cessation intervention that can be implemented within primary care centers in Syria. The collected information will inform local efforts to increase the availability of pharmacological and behavioral support for smoking cessation.

## Published Studies:

### Mapping the health and environmental situation in informal zones in Aleppo, Syria: report from the Aleppo household survey.

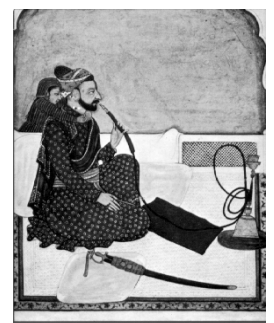
**D**espite large communities living in informal zones around major cities in Syria, there is currently no information on the health and environmental situations in these areas. From May to August 2004, the Syrian Center for Tobacco Studies (SCTS) conducted the first household survey aiming to provide a baseline map of main health problems and exposures affecting these communities in Aleppo. Information on 1,021 participants randomly selected using stratified cluster sampling were available (46% males, mean age 34, age range 18-65 years, response rate 86%), including self-reported health/disability, exposures, and saliva cotinine measurement. Some positive findings include better than expected access to electricity, piped water, city sewage, and the use of propane for cooking. Particular areas of concern include high fertility rates, overcrowded housing conditions, and gender inequality in education and work. Household features likely to reflect negatively on residents' health include the use of diesel chimneys for heating and lack of smoking restrictions. Overall, residents of informal zones suffer from substantial physical and mental health problems and are exposed to high levels of indoor air pollution. All seem to affect women and the elderly disproportionately, while men are more affected by smoking, occupational respiratory exposures, and injuries. Both infectious and non-infectious respiratory outcomes were very common among study participants. Chronic and degenerative disease, including CVD and joint problems, were a source of substantial morbidity among the studied communities. This study highlights major health and environmental specificities of marginalized populations living in Aleppo, where women seem to bear a disproportionate burden of poor health and disability. Smoking and exposure to tobacco smoke seem among the major exposures facing these populations.



Maziak W, Ward KD, Mzayek F, Rastam S, Bachir ME, Fouad MF, Hammal F, Asfar T, Mock J, Nuwayhid I, Frumkin H, Grimsley F, Chibli M. Mapping the health and environmental situation in informal zones in Aleppo, Syria;report from the Aleppo household survey. *Int Arch Occup Environ Health*. 2005 Jul 6;[Epub a head of print].

### Comparison of patterns of use, beliefs, and attitudes related to waterpipe between beginning and established smokers

**T**he aim of this study is to compare patterns of use, beliefs, and attitudes related to waterpipe smoking between university students (beginning smokers) and café customers (established smokers) in Aleppo, Syria, in order to explore the evolution of this smoking method. Two cross-sectional surveys were conducted among representative samples of university students (total 587, 48.4% men, mean age 22 years), and waterpipe users among café customers (total 268, 60% men, mean age 30 years) in Aleppo, Syria. We used interviewer-administered questionnaire inquiring about pattern of waterpipe smoking (initiation, frequency), situational characteristics of use (partner, place, sharing), beliefs related to waterpipe smoking (harmful/addictive properties of waterpipe), attitudes related to waterpipe smoking (confidence in quitting, will to quit, motivation for quitting, past year quit attempt), and cigarette smoking. The study shows that daily and regular patterns of smoking become more prevalent with increased duration of smoking, but intermittent smoking remains the predominant pattern of waterpipe use. Women seem to be drawn later to the habit, which seem to escape the usual taboo against women's cigarette smoking. Patterns and context of waterpipe use tend to change with progress of the practice affecting frequency, setting, and sharing of waterpipe. Unlike beginners, established waterpipe smokers seem more smoking-method oriented, more hooked on the habit, less willing to quit, and less likely to foresee challenges to quitting. The study shows that use patterns and attitudes related to waterpipe smoking evolve to accommodate the change in dependence and life circumstances of the smoker. Most of use features, beliefs, attitudes, as well as time-course seem unique to this smoking method requiring novel approach to intervention.



Asfar T, Ward KD, Eissenberg T, Maziak W. Comparison of patterns of use, beliefs, and attitudes related to waterpipe between beginning and established smokers *BMC Public Health* 2005 Feb 25;

## Extent of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) and its dose-response relation to respiratory health among adults

**T**here is a dearth of standardized studies examining exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) and its relationship to respiratory health among adults in developing countries. In 2004, the Syrian Center for Tobacco Studies (SCTS) conducted a population-based survey using stratified cluster sampling to look at issues related to environmental health of adults aged 18-65 years in Aleppo (2,500,000 inhabitants). Exposure to ETS was assessed from multiple self-reported indices combined into a composite score (maximum 22), while outcomes included both self-report (symptoms/diagnosis of asthma, bronchitis, and hay fever), and objective indices (spirometric assessment of FEV1 and FVC). Logistic and linear regression analyses were conducted to study the relation between ETS score and studied outcomes, whereby categorical (tertiles) and continuous scores were used respectively, to evaluate the association between ETS exposure and respiratory health, and explore the dose-response relationship of the association. Of 2038 participants, 1118 were current non-smokers with breath CO levels  $\leq 10$  ppm (27.1% men, mean age 34.7 years) and were included in the current analysis. The vast majority of study participants were exposed to ETS, whereby only 3.6% had ETS score levels  $\leq 2$ . In general, there was a significant dose-response pattern in the relationship of ETS score with symptoms of asthma, hay fever, and bronchitis, but not with diagnoses of these outcomes. The magnitude of the effect was in the range of twofold increases in the frequency of symptoms reported in the high exposure group compared to the low exposure group. Severity of specific respiratory problems, as indicated by frequency of symptoms and health care utilization for respiratory problems, was not associated with ETS exposure. Exposure to ETS was associated with impaired lung function, indicative of airflow limitation, among women only. This study provides evidence for the alarming extent of exposure to ETS among adult non-smokers in Syria, and its dose-response relationship with respiratory symptoms of infectious and non-infectious nature. It calls for concerted efforts to increase awareness of this public health problem and to enforce regulations aimed at protecting non-smokers.



Maziak W, Ward KD, Rastam S, Mzayek F, Eissenberg T. Extent of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) and its dose-response relation to respiratory health among adults. *Respir Res* 2005;6(1):13

## Science in the Arab World

**I**n this essay Dr. Maziak of the Syrian Center for Tobacco Studies argues that all of us now should have a vested interest in advancing science and technology in the Arab and Muslim world. Not only can science and technology help to feed people, improve their health, and create wealth, but they can help reduce societal tensions and build international bridges for badly needed dialogue and mutual understanding. To usher science and technology more thoroughly into Arab culture and society, however, Maziak suggests that the West needs to acknowledge the Arab world's historical contributions, and he advises the Arab world to stop dwelling on its golden past by embracing lessons about science and technology that the West learned long ago



Maziak W. Science in the Arab World. *Science* 2005 June 3<sup>rd</sup>; Vol 308, Issue 5727, 1416-18  
Full text <http://www.sciencemag.org/sciext/globalvoices/>