

International Network of Women Against Tobacco

Advisory Board

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Editorial

In this 5th INWAT Europe newsletter we summarize the current state of tobacco use among Spanish women following the framework of the MPOWER policy package of the WHO (World Health Organization). Without conducting an exhaustive analysis, discussing each of the MPOWER policies from a gender perspective provides important information on the prevalence of smoking in Spanish women, as well as tobacco control and prevention policies in Spain.

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Spanish women and smoking

Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies. The social, political, and economic transformation that began in Spain in the 1970s, combined with marketing strategies designed by the tobacco industry to specifically target women, facilitated the spread of the tobacco epidemic among Spanish women. The percentage of women daily smokers peaked around the end of the last century, subsequently declining to a current level of 19%. Daily tobacco consumption in the general Spanish population has decreased significantly in recent years, dropping from 32% in 1993 to 23% in 2014. This decrease is largely due to a reduction in smoking in the male population (Fig. 1). The most recent data show that in all age groups men smoke more

than women (Fig. 2). Nonetheless, smoking rates among younger women remain very high. In fact, studies of pregnant women of a mean age of 30 years have revealed that 30% smoke at the beginning of pregnancy and 18% at the moment of birth.

Protect people from tobacco smoke. The most recent smoking control laws adopted by the Spanish state (in 2006 and 2011) have resulted in a marked decrease in second hand smoke (SHS) exposure in workplaces and hospitality venues. Evaluation of the consequences of smoking in the Spanish population, based on the rates of smoking-related mortality and lung cancer in recent years, reveals a decrease in both parameters in men, but an increase in both parameters in women. These data indicate that current policies designed to protect women from the effects of smoking are wholly inadequate, and need to be improved.

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Offer help to quit tobacco use. Within the Spanish public health system, smoking cessation programs are administered in a primary care setting, and no funding is provided for smoking cessation medications. In some autonomous communities, specialized units provide funding for smoking cessation drugs (nicotine replacement therapy, varenicline) for certain populations, and provide special care for pregnant smokers. Studies conducted in Spain show that women with the highest level of education and socioeconomic status are the most likely to quit smoking.

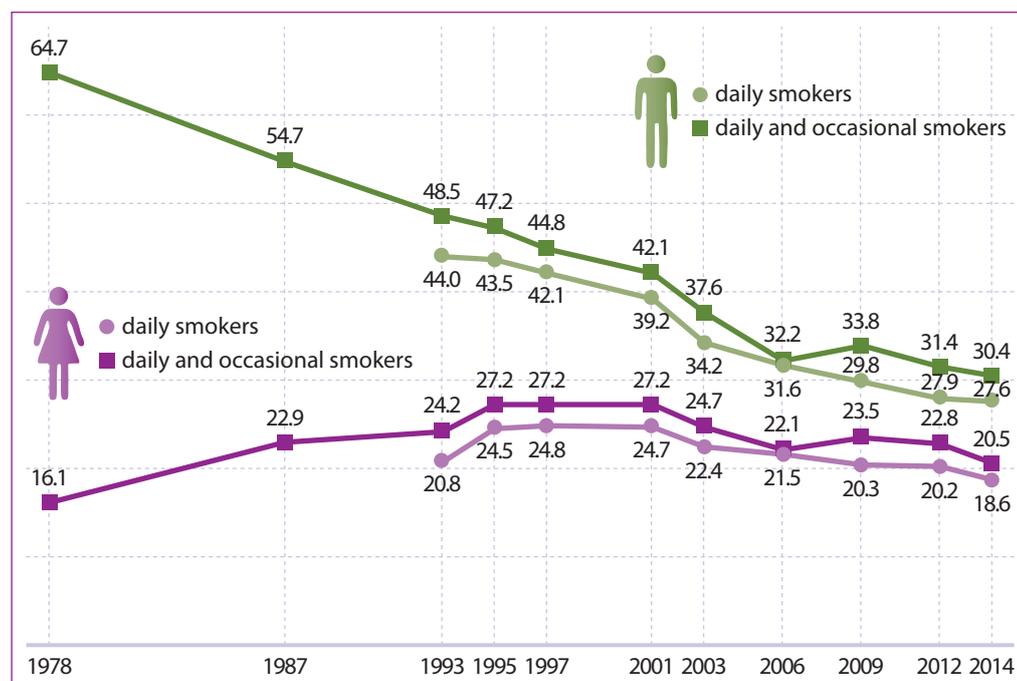


Figure 1: Evolution of tobacco consumption [%] according to sex in the Spanish population. ● daily smokers, ■ daily and occasional smokers. Sources: National Health Surveys (1987–2012) and European Health Survey (2014)

Warn about the dangers of tobacco. To date, the use of plain packaging for tobacco, which is a proven effective measure to provide information on the damage caused by tobacco, has not yet been implemented in Spain. Moreover, Spain has no smoking prevention campaigns that specifically target women, except for those aimed at pregnant women.

Enforce bans on advertising, promotion and sponsorship. Although tobacco advertising is banned in Spain, the tobacco industry continues to advertise indirectly, primarily targeting women. In women's magazines it is not unusual to find images of models smoking, as well as other images that continue to associate cigarettes with glamour and fashion. Nowadays on the Spanish market there are cigarettes with slim shape, and although the word "slim" doesn't appear in the packaging, we know that the target group of this product are women (Fig. 3).

Raise taxes on tobacco. Tobacco in Spain remains inexpensive: none of the 10 most sold brands in Spain in 2017 cost more than € 5 (between € 4.30 and € 4.95) per pack. Many tobacco brands cost € 3.95, and some packs of 20 cigarillos (blond tobacco wrapped in a tobacco leaf) sell for as little as € 2.95. Furthermore, rates of consumption of rolling tobacco, which is cheaper than conventional cigarettes, are relatively high among younger smokers.

Conclusion. As a consequence of the differential evolution of tobacco consumption in Spanish men and women, rates of smoking-associated mortality and lung cancer have increased in women while decreasing in men. In Spain, as in other countries, anti-smoking interventions targeting women have only focused on pregnant women. Meanwhile, the tobacco industry continues to market its products towards women in general. While pregnancy is a crucial period, and exposure to tobacco smoke has significant consequences for the foetus, it is nonetheless necessary to establish interventions and

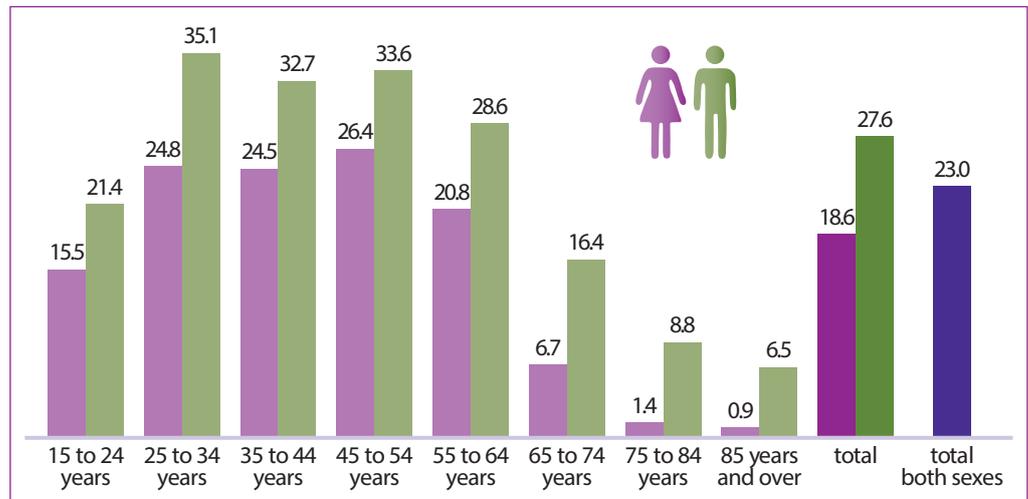


Figure 2: Percentage of daily smokers according to sex and age groups. Source: Encuesta Europea de Salud en España, 2014, <https://www.msssi.gob.es/estadEstudios/estadisticas/EncuestaEuropea/home.htm>



Figure 3: Packages of cigarettes with slim shape

policies specifically tailored for and aimed at women, paying special attention to more disadvantaged women, in order to curb the "feminization" of the tobacco epidemic and its consequences.

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European Tobacco Control conference in Porto – ensuring gender balance among the speakers

One of the key priorities shared by INWAT and the FCTC is the promotion of women's leadership in tobacco control. An important part of empowering women is ensuring the equal representation of women and men as speakers and chairs in different types of sessions at tobacco control conferences. Throughout history, although the majority of tobacco-control practitioners are women, they have often been underrepresented as plenary speakers. The Porto conference was

no exception. After counting male and female speakers and chairs, I found the following: opening and closing sessions 85 % men and 15 % women; plenary sessions: 65 % men and 35 % women and parallel sessions 52 % and 48 %. From now on, let's make talking about gender in conferences the norm, so that events that overlook this issue become a regrettable exception. Please join INWAT to make the next European conference more gender balanced! *Margaretha Haglund*

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