

For Every 50 Smokers – One Non-Smoker Dies from Secondhand Smoke Exposure

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Title: “Estimated worldwide mortality related to second hand tobacco smoke exposure, 1990-2016”

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Bottom Line: Roughly 50 lifetime smokers are associated with the death of one non-smoker, according to a large-scale data analysis.

Why this research is interesting: To get a better understanding of the scale of harm inflicted by smokers, researchers used a large-scale data set to develop a “secondhand smoke index” that calculated the number of smokers associated with the death of a non-smoker in different regions of the world. The findings assign responsibility of harm to smokers, with the hope that this analysis will change their habits, and has the potential to change smoking policies to protect non-smokers from secondhand smoke exposure.

How the research was conducted: Researchers from Mount Sinai Heart and VU University Medical Center Amsterdam in the Netherlands analyzed a large-scale dataset on global smoking behavior from “*Our World in Data*.” This is comprised of several different, high quality datasets from a number of sources including World Health Organization, Global Burden of Disease Reports, and International Mortality and Smoking Statistics. Data included the number of active smokers and secondhand smoke victims (those who died from premature death due to secondhand smoke) from 1990 – 2016. Researchers compared World Bank regions – North America, South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, East Asia and Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and Caribbean.

They tabulated the number of lifetime smokers in each country and the premature deaths related to second hand smoke in that country (average lifetime smoking was set at 24 years based on epidemiological data). The analysis also included the average number of cigarettes smokers used. Researchers calculated the number of pack years associated with death in one non-smoker through second hand smoke, the so-called pack-year index (PYI). They also calculated the number of lifetime smokers associated with the death of one nonsmoker, i.e. the second hand smoke index.

What the results show: Researchers calculated that in 2016, 52 current lifetime smokers were associated with the death of one non-smoker worldwide. This is an increase from 1990, when 31 lifetime smokers were associated with the death of one non-smoker, and reflects the relative effectiveness of anti-tobacco measures like smoking bans in restaurants. The secondhand smoke index was more favorable in North America—around 90 smokers related to one death—where there are more protective laws against smoking in public area. Regions like the Middle East or Southeast Asia had less favorable numbers—around 40 smokers to one death—due to minimum or no protective measures.

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