

PRESS RELEASE

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Public Discussion: “Feminization of smoking epidemics in Armenia: is this unavoidable?”.

Yerevan- On Thursday, April 7, 2006, the American University of Armenia (AUA) hosted a Panel Discussion titled “**Feminization of smoking epidemics in Armenia: is this unavoidable?**”.

The panel discussion was organized by the AUA with support from the OSIAF within the tobacco control project of the Armenian Public Health Alliance (a consortium of Armenian Public Health Association, Armenian Public Health Union, and the American University of Armenia).

The attendees included non-governmental organizations- members of the Coalition for Tobacco Free Armenia, presented by women, environmental, health and youth NGOs, AUA students and staff, the general public, as well as the media representatives.

Dr. Varduhi Petrosyan, Acting Dean of the College of Health Sciences, opened the panel. The invited guests had 5-10 minutes for short presentations expressing their thoughts and comments on the issue of interest.

Ms. Hranush Hakobyan, President of the Armenia Branch of the Armenian International Women Association (AIWA) and the author of the tobacco control law, said: “ We need to explain people that smoking is not only harmful to health, but also is a sign of ignorance. Smoking leads to a slow death; why to live with smoking if one can live his/ her life with dignity”.

Dr. Anna Hakobyan, Team Leader, Democracy and Social Reform Office, USAID presented health education components of the health projects supported by the USAID in a number of marzes across Armenia. In her words, “Studies have shown a strong association between smoking during pregnancy and the risk of invasive meningitis during early childhood. The risk of bacterial meningitis is 5 times higher among children whose mothers smoked during pregnancy. Smoking during pregnancy is also associated with low birth weight and premature birth. Additionally, nicotine weakens the effect of cancer drugs. In the most recent issue of the Proceedings of the US National Academy of Science, it was found that the level of nicotine in the blood of average smoker will interfere with the action of anti-cancer drugs on tumor cells”.

Dr. Narine Movsisyan, ArmPHA tobacco control project director, focused in her presentation on new negative trends in smoking epidemics, such as younger age at initiation of smoking in girls and diminishing gradient of female smoking between rural and urban areas. In her opinion, “the tobacco industry aggressive and misleading marketing to young females is one of the most important factors in the growth of the epidemics. As an example, she pointed out the recent promotional campaign implemented by Cigaronne ltd”.

Ms. Karine Movsisyan, President of the Goris Youth Union, agreed with a previous speaker that more young women are up taking smoking in marzes. She talked about efforts to confront the epidemics of women smoking in Syunik marz.

Ms. Hayastan Stepanyan, Legal Expert, Urban Foundation, emphasized the importance of the enforcement of the adopted policies to increase public compliance with the law.