

Editorial:

SMOG: A SERIOUS PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

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SMOG is a type of threatening air pollution which is declared as Public Health Emergency in South East Asia recently.¹ The most hit areas are Pakistan, India and China.² This problem of SMOG has recently gained much significance in Pakistan due to the involvement of a larger area as compared to areas affected in the last 70 years. Recent projects of coal as source of energy, high rates of emissions from unmonitored industries, a large number of vehicles on road, increasing trends of deforestation to construct new roads and recently the burning of crops remnants has added fuel to the fire.³ Lack of Public transport system has led to 9% increase in the vehicles as compared to statistics of last five years.⁴ Pakistan, India and Bangladesh emit highest number of hydrocarbons in their fuel emissions as compared to other SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries.⁵ SMOG not only affects the physical health of inhabitants in terms of respiratory & eye infections but also affects the mental and social health aspects.⁶ Fine particulate matter of fewer than 2 microns can be inhaled directly into the lungs causing increasing hospitalization rates in the SMOG hit areas.⁷ Inability to commute and fulfilling the social and domestic commitments also affect the mental health. Increase the number of accidents related to SMOG not only causes a high mortality pattern but also affects the social and economic state of the country.⁸ It is high time to think about preventive measures so we can reduce the burden of physical, mental and social impact on citizens of Pakistan.

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The government of Pakistan should now focus on community planning to reduce the number of unmonitored factories, less involvement of Coal-based energy projects, improvement of the public transport system and establishment of strong regulatory authorities that can target emissions and gas productions in air. Government has taken initiatives for control of this problem but as individuals, targeting tree implantation at household level, regular checkups of automobiles, Carpooling for transport and informing the law enforcing agencies about irregularities can significantly contribute in reduction of this public health issue.⁹ Increasing public awareness among masses by use of mass media is also a good strategy which has produced long-lasting effects in china.¹⁰

India has recently introduced fines on illegal crop burning. The government of India has also introduced an odd-even scheme allowing an only odd number of cars on one day on-road and even number on the other day. Commercial trucks have been banned in cities. Construction has been stopped to deal with the acute condition. The need of the hour is that we should not only focus on acute measures but should have a long term plan for dealing with this important public health issue.

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