

Short Communication

## **Paradoxical Tobacco Use Trends in Himachali Males: Need for Serious Introspection**

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**Abstract:** India is the second largest producer and consumer of tobacco in the world. More than one million deaths occur in a year in India due to tobacco use. International and national agencies spend a fortune on anti-tobacco campaigns every year. Himachal Pradesh, a small hilly state of north India with a population of about 7 million, was declared the first "smoke-free" state in the country in 2013. COTPA, banning of smokeless tobacco and loose cigarettes and raising taxes every year were all aimed at reducing tobacco use. The study was aimed at observing the impact of the multi-pronged anti-tobacco efforts in the state of Himachal Pradesh. A review of the National Family Health Survey-3 and 4, India, as a whole has shown a decreased use in tobacco use among women (from 10.8% in NFHS-3 to 6.8%) and in men (from 57% in NFHS-3 to 44.5% in NFHS-4). All the north Indian states too have shown a decline in tobacco use among women. However, a reversal in the trend i.e. increase in tobacco use has been noted among the males of Himachal Pradesh (from 40% in NFHS-3 to 40.5% in NFHS-4). Conclusions: India and all north Indian states have shown a decline in tobacco use since NFHS-3 except in the men of Himachal Pradesh who have shown an increase in the use of tobacco as noted during NFHS-4. An upward surge instead of a fall in tobacco use in a small state which has shown exemplary performance in introducing all the contemporary laws and steps towards discouraging the use of tobacco, calls for serious introspection of the existing situation. Still, a lot remains to be done to improve awareness and to strengthen implementation of the existing legislations which should ultimately culminate in change of individual behaviour and hence reduction in tobacco use.

**Keywords:** Tobacco control, Himachal Pradesh, NHFS

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Himachal Pradesh, a small hilly state of north India with a population of about 7 million [1], experienced the proud distinction of being declared as the first "smoke-free" state in the country in 2013 for achieving excellent compliance with the relevant parameters of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003 [2]. The state was fully committed towards eliminating public smoking as more than 2,500 panchayats passed resolutions for compliance with COTPA provisions. The state raised taxes year after year and added additional VAT too. Sale of Smokeless tobacco was also banned [2]. HP also prohibited the sale of loose cigarettes and beedis in 2016[2]. International and national agencies spend a fortune on anti-tobacco campaigns every year. All these

efforts were aimed at dissuading the peace loving citizens of Himachal from tobacco use and smoking.

Everything was apparently moving in the right direction and the government was basking in the success of implementing the necessary laws and provisions until the results of the National Family Health Survey 4 (2015-16) [3] were made public (Figure 1). The country and north India have shown a significant overall decline in the use of tobacco and use by adult females also shows a downward trend (Figure 2). A surprising finding which would raise eyebrows, especially in the Himachal context, is the upward trend over 10 years in tobacco use by adult Himachali males in the 15-49 age group as compared to the NFHS 3 survey done in 2005-06 (Figure 3) [4]. This upward surge instead of a fall in tobacco use in a state which

has shown exemplary performance in introducing all the contemporary laws and steps towards discouraging the use of tobacco, calls for serious introspection of the existing situation. What went wrong? This question is bound to haunt all the stakeholders for quite some time now. There is an urgent need to introspect and explore other avenues than the vertical working pattern of

government programmes and to involve non-governmental organisations in using other approaches to spread awareness and to strengthen implementation which should ultimately culminate in change of individual behaviour not to initiate or to quit tobacco use.

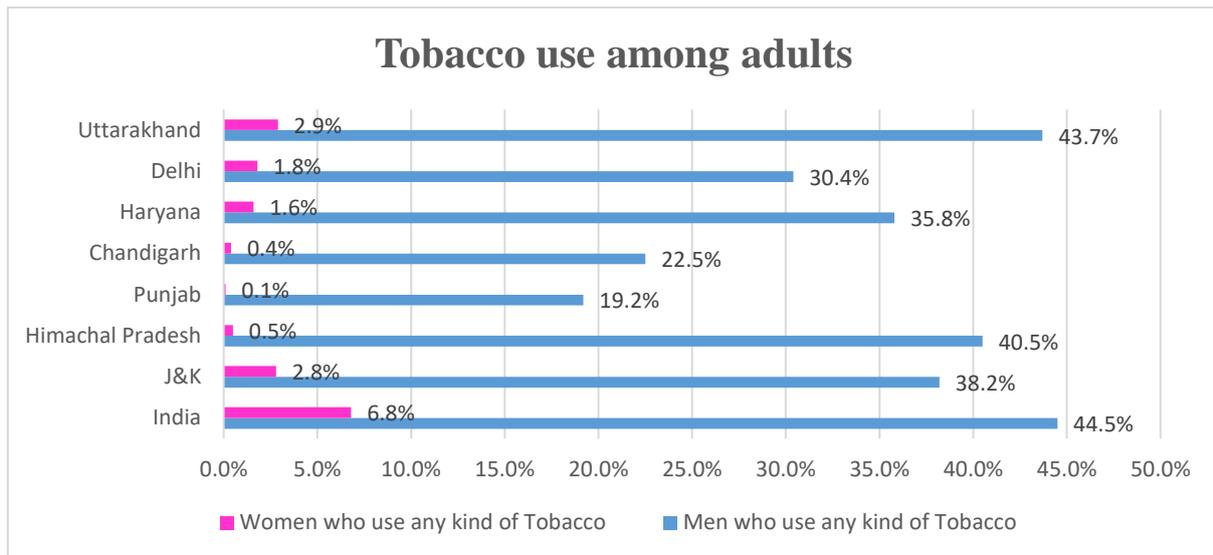


Fig-1: Tobacco use among adults (NFHS 4)

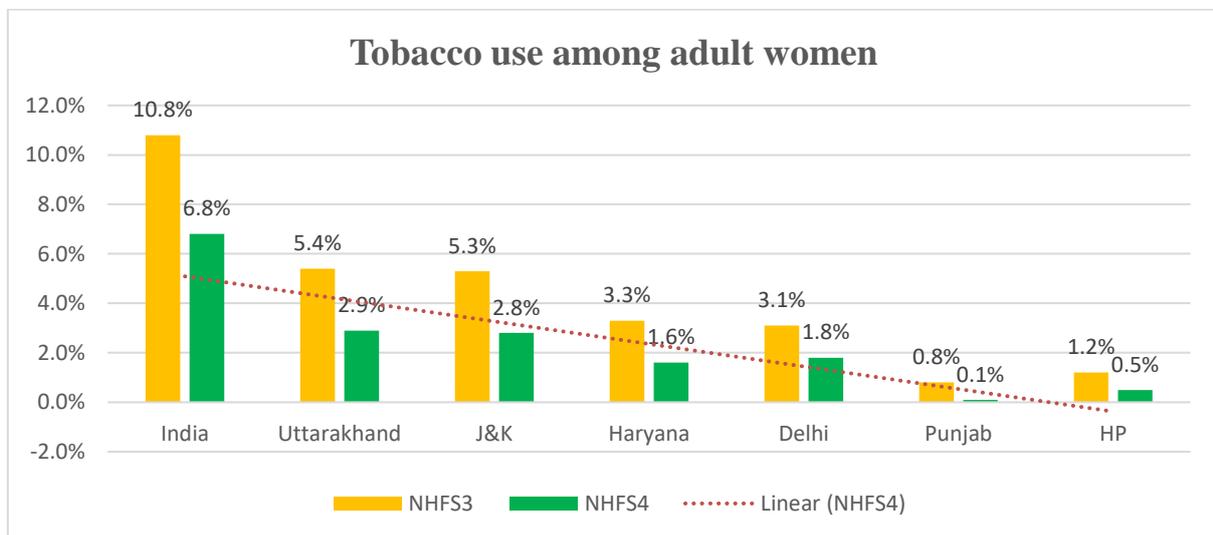


Fig-2: Trend in tobacco use among adult women of north India

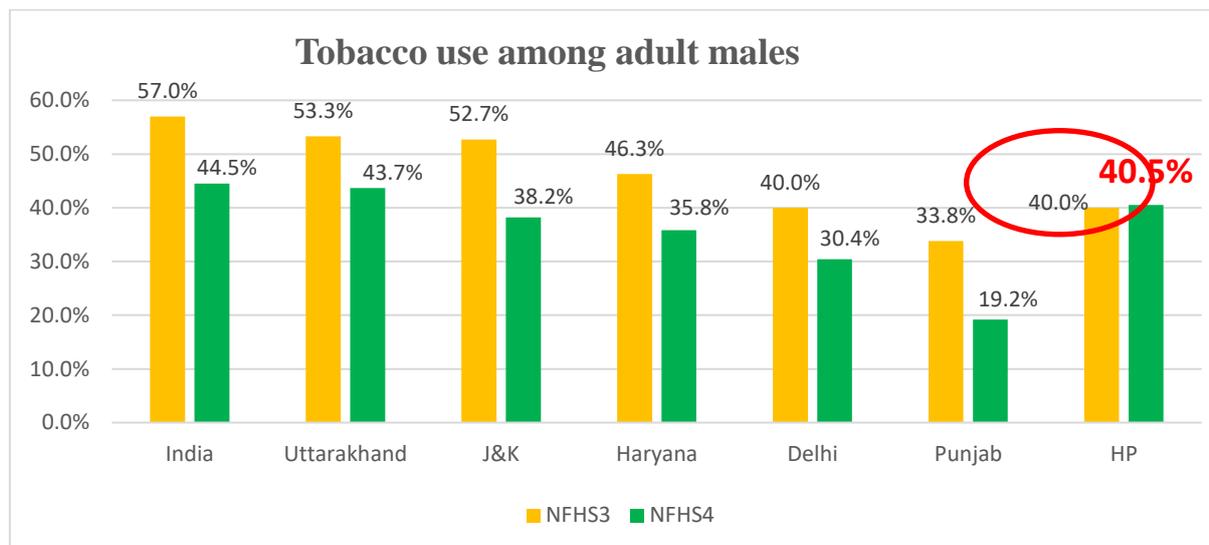


Fig-3: Trends in tobacco use among adult men of north India

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