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Reflections on the tobacco-free generation: methodological challenges and global implications

The Article by Julia Rey Brandariz and colleagues¹ estimated the effects of tobacco elimination on lung-cancer mortality. Unsurprisingly, countries with the highest prevalence of smoking are projected to have the greatest reduction in preventable deaths under such a strategy. However, there is potential for improvement globally.

The Article¹ provides analysis by sex; however, given the nature of the individual data used, socioeconomic status was considered only by income at the country level. Regardless of the economic development of a country, groups of low socioeconomic status drive the increase in smoking prevalence in countries that are in the early-to-middle stages of the smoking pandemic transition,^{2,3} as evidenced by the findings of a 2022 study that examined data for 82 low-income and middle-low-income countries.⁴ Future studies should consider incorporating the socioeconomic status of individuals, probably through additional modelling, within their country-level estimates.

Tobacco-control policies, although proven effective, have contributed to increasing social disparities among people who smoke.⁵ In countries where the prevalence of smoking has substantially decreased, tobacco consumption remains disproportionately high in low socioeconomic groups. We encourage the addition of an equity perspective when analysing the impact of such policies, to understand the social effects of tobacco control and incoming strategies and to ensure that no one is left behind.

In conclusion, given the widespread socioeconomic inequalities in

tobacco use across most countries, a tobacco-elimination strategy—even if challenging to achieve in the short term—could yield substantial health benefits for the population while also helping to reduce disparities in smoking-related health and mortality outcomes.

We declare no competing interests.

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**Sergi Trias-Llimós, Ariadna Feliu, Esteve Fernández*
strias@ced.uab.cat

Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics, Centres de Recerca de Catalunya (CERCA), Carrer de Ca n'Altayó, Edifici E2, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 08193 Bellaterra, Spain (ST-L); Department of Primary Care and Public Health, School of Public Health, Imperial College London, London, UK (AF); Centre for Biomedical Research in Respiratory Diseases (CIBERES), Institute of Health Carlos III, Madrid, Spain (AF, EF); Tobacco Control Research Group, Bellvitge Biomedical Research Institute (EF) and Tobacco Control Unit, Catalan Institute of Oncology – WHO Collaborating Centre for Tobacco Control (EF), l'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Barcelona, Spain; Department of Clinical Sciences, School of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain (EF); Department of Health, Government of Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain (EF)

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