

For Immediate Release



Researchers from AUB and the world mobilize to highlight dangers of hookah smoking through special research supplement

Beirut, Lebanon- 17/03/2015 - With waterpipe tobacco smoking increasing substantially over the past decade, especially among teens, researchers from all over the world have joined forces to zero in on the causes of this global epidemic, in the hopes of finding more effective solutions.

As a first step, researchers from AUB, the Arab region, and the United States have compiled all relevant research on the topic over the past 10-20 years and will release it in a special journal supplement on waterpipe tobacco smoking, which has been found to be potentially more harmful to health than cigarette smoking, contrary to prevailing beliefs.

The release will coincide with the world's largest conference on tobacco research, the World Conference on Tobacco or Health held in Abu Dhabi on March 17-21, and will feature seven articles by leading experts on the health impacts of tobacco. The supplement will be published in the upcoming issue of Tobacco Control. It is jointly sponsored by the Center for the Study of Tobacco Products at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), VCU's Massey Cancer Center, New York University Abu Dhabi Institute, and the American University of Beirut.

The current research findings from all over the world are cause for alarm.

Time trends from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey, GYTS, (1999-2008) with more than half a million participants worldwide concluded that while cigarette smoking is either stable or declining in many parts of the world, other forms of tobacco are showing a rising trend, most notably waterpipe smoking.

Meanwhile, data from the 2011 GYTS for Lebanon showed that almost 35 percent of boys and girls aged 13 to 15 years old regularly smoke waterpipe tobacco, which is also commonly known as the arguile, narguile, hookah, or hubbly-bubbly. Additionally, almost 60 percent of teens within the same age group had tried it at least once, so far, that year.

As for Jordan, waterpipe smoking among teenagers increased by 72 percent among boys and 136 percent among girls between 2008 and 2011, according to a study published in 2013 in the European Journal of Public Health.

The trend in the United States is no less disconcerting: A survey of data from the National Youth Tobacco Survey over two years (2011-2012), involving 43,524 high school students,

showed an increased in waterpipe tobacco smoking by 32 percent, at a time when cigarette smoking was declining.

"The purpose of this supplement is to compile all the data available in one place so that we know where are the data and research gaps, so we could focus on them in future research studies and come closer to finding effective solutions to this global epidemic," said Rima Nakkash, associate professor at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and coordinator of the AUB Tobacco Control Research Group.

"In the Arab world, waterpipe tobacco smoking is very, very common," said Thomas Eissenberg, a professor in the Department of Psychology of the College at VCU and co-director of the Center for the Study of Tobacco Products. "We wanted to get this supplement out to draw attention during the World Conference to the fact that waterpipe tobacco smoking has spread so much and that we know enough now to say, yes, it's dangerous. And yet governments aren't doing enough, we believe, to stop it."

The articles in the supplement delve into an array of topics related to hookahs, which are typically filled with sweetened, flavored tobacco known as mu'assel. According to research studies, mu'assel is one of the main reasons that turned waterpipe smoking into a popular habit among youths. Other reasons include the emergence of Ramadan tents that offered waterpipes in the 1990s and the absence of waterpipe-specific policies and regulations.

"We look into the epidemiology of the waterpipe - who's using it now? Why so many people have started using it? What have we learned about what's in the smoke of the waterpipe? What are the health effects of using it? Does it cause dependence? Is the second-hand smoke dangerous?" "And what have governments done about it? What legislation or policies address waterpipe tobacco smoking?" said Scott, Sherman, associate professor of population health at New York University School of Medicine and Co-Director of the NYU/Abu Dhabi Public Health Research Center.

"We're saying, we need to do something about it now, and there are policies and regulations that could be put in place to reduce it," noted Nakkash.

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For more information please contact:

Maha Al-Azar, Director of News and Information, ma110@aub.edu.lb,
01-75 96 85

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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