

Tobacco harm reduction and better treatment could **save nearly two million lives in selected countries in the Middle East.**

**REPORT SUPPORTED BY INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL TOBACCO HARM REDUCTION EXPERTS
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REPORT BY: DEREK YACH, CHERYL OLSON,
DELON HUMAN, AND KARL FAGERSTROM

1. Executive Summary

GLOBAL PROGRESS TO END SMOKING HAS STALLED. CURRENT APPROACHES TO TOBACCO CONTROL HAVE NOT BEEN SUFFICIENT. THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) PROJECTS THAT 1.27 BILLION PEOPLE GLOBALLY WILL SMOKE BY 2025. OVER EIGHT MILLION ANNUALLY WILL DIE FROM TOBACCO USE. THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE FROM A PUBLIC HEALTH PERSPECTIVE.

This report focuses on seven countries in the Middle East - Pakistan, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. A total of 390 million people live in these countries. Of these, 61 million adults use tobacco products, and 384,000 die prematurely every year because they use tobacco products.

WHO projects that smoking prevalence in the Middle East will only decrease slightly, from 33.3% in 2020 to 31% in 2025. This is the smallest decline among all WHO regions. This calls for urgent action, not a continuation of the status quo.

Data presented shows that tobacco use contributes to several major causes of death in these countries that are set to increase over the next few decades. These include lung and oral cancer, COPD, heart disease, and stroke. They will impose significant human and economic costs.

The report considers how tobacco harm reduction (THR) products could reduce this burden. THR products use nicotine without the deadly exposures that cause harm. THR products (e-cigarettes/vapes, heated tobacco products, snus, nicotine pouches, and charcoal free shisha) are rapidly gaining traction among consumers in the Middle East. But these innovations have not yet been embraced by physicians and governments as key to cutting premature deaths.

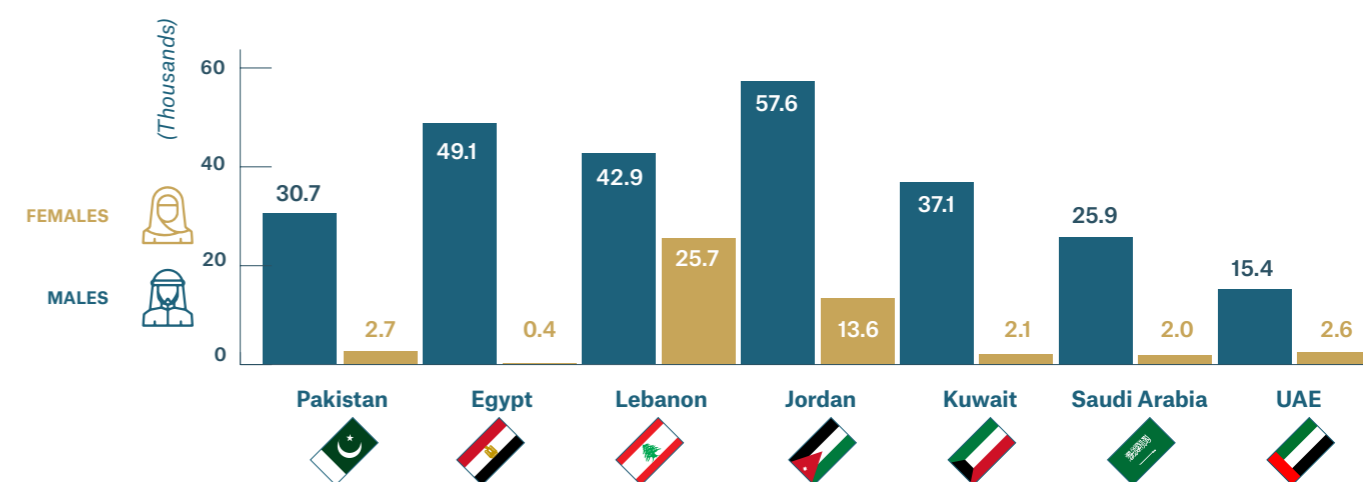
The report comes as the quality of evidence on the benefits of smoking cessation and THR has strengthened. Cessation at every age is associated with longer survival, and switching to THR products is almost twice as effective for cessation as nicotine replacement therapies. While long-term studies on the health benefits effects of switching to THR are still needed, results of studies using biomarkers of future diseases are promising.

This report also comes at a time when many countries have recently reversed bans on many THR products and liberalized their approach to THR. New and innovative THR products are being developed in and for the Middle East. A further sign of growing acceptance of the value of THR and the demand for them by consumers.

We calculated the combined impact of embracing THR, better cessation services, and improved lung cancer treatment in the seven Middle East countries on long term trends in health.

The analysis shows that over 1.8 million lives could be saved by 2060 through these interventions, compared to continuing with current WHO-directed tobacco control efforts alone.

Figure 1. Adult smoking rates by sex, 2022



To achieve these gains, key actions are needed, including:

- **Activating physicians to communicate the benefits of THR to patients in all clinical encounters, to counter disinformation about nicotine and the value of THR, and to develop a regional equivalent of the Royal College of Physicians report on THR and vapes.**
- **Governments continue to revise regulations to improve access to THR products and invest in national science and research to advance THR.**
- **Creating independent science-based consumer groups able to advocate for their needs.**
- **Supporting religious leaders to guide their communities to quit smoking and support tobacco harm reduction.**

Embracing THR, cessation, and improved lung cancer treatment represents a major opportunity for the Middle East to dramatically improve the health of its populations.

Enquiries about the report to be directed to;

DEREK YACH MBCHB MPH
derek@globalhealthconsults.net

Global Health Consults LLC,
205 Wakeman Lane,
Southport,
CT 06890
USA.