

China tries to get people to stop smoking

By McClatchy Foreign Staff, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.15.15

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Level **630L**



Yang Gonghuan checks her email in her office, lined with books and reports on China's tobacco usage and health problems, Dec. 4, 2014, in Beijing, China. Yang, an epidemiologist, has been on the front lines of researching China's smoking-related illnesses for decades. Stuart Leavenworth/McClatchy DC/TNS

BEIJING — Many women in China work in offices filled with clouds of cigarette smoke. However, it is usually not the women who are smoking. Most often, it is the men they work with.

After work is over, many women go home to even more cigarette smoke. Again, the smoke is usually not created by them. The smokers are their husbands or other men in the family.

Smoking is very common in China. The country is even known as the Smoking Dragon. However, women smoke far less than men do.

In 2010, about 288 million Chinese men smoked. The same year, only 13 million women were smokers.

Women Work For New Rules

Lately, Chinese women are fighting back. They know that cigarette smoke is not only bad for smokers. It is also bad for people around them. So-called secondhand smoke can make nonsmokers sick. It is very bad for children.

Women have been very important in trying to control smoking. They have been pushing the government to make new smoking rules.

Last November, their efforts paid off. The Chinese government came up with a tough new set of rules on smoking.

The new rules have yet to start. However, many are hopeful they will become law.

"This is a very important step," said Dr. Yang Gonghuan. Yang has been studying the dangers of tobacco since the 1980s.

"It is very difficult to push for these kinds of changes," she said. "It has taken many, many years."

It Will Be A Long Battle

China is known for its smog caused by factories and cars. However, tobacco is a much bigger health problem. Each year, around 1 million Chinese die from diseases caused by smoking.

Of course, not only women are fighting against smoking. Some men are also trying to get the Chinese to smoke less. Ex-basketball player Yao Ming is one famous example.

However, women are leading the way against smoking.

Smoking has gone down over the years. But the battle against tobacco is far from won.

More than half of Chinese men still smoke regularly. About 700 million Chinese breathe in secondhand smoke. It kills around 100,000 people there every year.

Centuries Of Smoke

The Chinese have smoked tobacco for hundreds of years. Women once smoked about as much as men.

Things changed after most Chinese switched from pipes to cigarettes in the early 1900s. Cigarette-smoking was seen as not for ladies. Soon, many women quit smoking.

Things were different for male smokers. Chinese leaders smoked openly in public. They made smoking even more popular among men.

Smoking in public places is still common across the country. Even many Chinese doctors smoke.

Big Changes Are Coming

If the new rules pass, China will see big changes. Smoking at work, in restaurants or in other public places will be against the law.

Xu Guihua has been fighting against public smoking. She said the new rules would only work if everyone helps out. After all, the police cannot be everywhere.

Chinese ideas about smoking will have to change, she said.

“In the past several hundred years, people have” gotten used to “smoking wherever they want,” she said. “Changing this will take some time.”

Even so, Xu is hopeful that change will come. For one thing, Chinese President Xi Jinping takes the smoking problem seriously.

Xi has probably been influenced by his wife, Peng Liyuan. She was once a very popular singer. These days, Peng is well known for speaking out against smoking.

Quiz

- 1 What is the article mainly about?
- (A) how smoking is an important part of Chinese culture that nobody wants to get rid of
 - (B) how some groups led by women are working to decrease the number of people who smoke in China
 - (C) how a few famous people are supporting the decrease in smoking in China
 - (D) how the number of men who smoke is much higher than the number of women who smoke in China

- 2 Read the following summary of the article.

Women are leading the fight to end smoking in China. This fight is very difficult to win. However, these groups have made some progress in making China a smoke-free zone.

What would be the BEST sentence to add to this summary?

- (A) Women used to smoke just as much as men, but things have changed.
- (B) China's long history of smoking makes it difficult for people to accept changing attitudes about the practice.
- (C) More than half of Chinese men still smoke, even though information about smoking's harmful effects is available.
- (D) Some of the rules that limit smoking have passed, but they have not yet been made into laws.

3 Read the following sentence from the article.

The Chinese government came up with a tough new set of rules on smoking.

What does the word "tough" mean in the article?

- (A) serious
- (B) well-made
- (C) strict
- (D) difficult

4 Read the following sentence from the article.

"It is very difficult to push for these kinds of changes," she said.

What do the words "push for" mean in the article?

- (A) establish
- (B) advertise
- (C) force
- (D) shove

Answer Key

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