

CHANGING

SOCIAL

VALUES

Chapter- 05

CHANGING SOCIAL VALUES

Values, which influence conduct, change over time as the social milieu is re-configured by social, economic and cultural shifts that occur over time, both within and across societies. This holds true of tobacco consumption as well. As traditional values slacken their stranglehold in rural societies and are rapidly substituted by increasingly modern codes of behaviour in urban societies, the socio-cultural influences that encourage or discourage tobacco use are altering. These require to be studied and tracked by advocates of tobacco control who must not only identify but also influence these processes to curb tobacco consumption. Otherwise, they would leave the field open to the tobacco industry which avidly studies these socio-cultural indicators and their determinants to manipulate them to its advantage. The paucity of studies in this area is a cause for concern but should also be stimulus for concerted action by social scientists and health professionals.^{104,105,109,112}

KEY MESSAGES: ^{114-117,121,123}

- Historically, tobacco consumption has been linked with social status and commensality.

- Tobacco consumption is associated with different symbolic and often moral overtones across all societies.
- The habit of rural men, usually assembled in caste-based or social class-based groups, sharing a hookah in daily gatherings, is an example of fellowship, solidarity and the consultative process.
- The use of tobacco by women is often considered, by different sections of society, in ways different from that of men. Among urban women, smoking is often seen as a symbol of emancipation and modernity.
- Smoking habits, which might have their origins in rebellion or the thrill of illicit experimentation, have become linked with freedom and equality among those who have suffered social or gender inequality.
- The greater use of smokeless tobacco by women is associated with less stigma compared to smoking.
- As traditional values slacken their stranglehold in rural societies and are rapidly substituted by modern codes of behaviour in urban societies, the socio-cultural influences that encourage or discourage tobacco use are altering. These need to be studied carefully to control tobacco consumption.