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CAMBODIAN WOMEN CHEW TOBACCO FOR MORNING SICKNESS RELIEF

GENEVA – Tobacco control that focuses on cigarette smokers in Cambodia misses a huge number of women who chew tobacco, according to research published today in the international public health journal, the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*.

The largest nationwide survey on adult tobacco use in Cambodia found that, while very few women smoke cigarettes, more than half of all women aged more than 48 years chew tobacco. Many of them started the habit when pregnant to seek relief from morning sickness.

"Chewing tobacco appears to be strongly influenced by beliefs passed on by older relatives," says lead author Dr Pramil N Singh, from the School of Public Health at Loma Linda University in the United States of America. "The behaviour is seen as a rite of passage into womanhood. Further research is needed to find out whether village health workers actively promote its medicinal use."

"Not only should we be concerned that these women are taking up an addictive and deadly habit, even more serious is the damage it can cause to a developing baby," says Dr Douglas Bettcher, director of the Tobacco Free Initiative at the World Health Organization. "Pregnant women who use tobacco put their babies at risk of low-birth weight, decreased lung function and even stillbirth."

Tobacco control programmes in Cambodia face the challenge of long-held traditional beliefs and may need to include health education for older relatives and health workers.

Read the paper here: <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/12/08-058917.pdf>

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For further information please contact:

Sarah Cumberland
Bulletin of the World Health Organization
Geneva, Switzerland
Office: +41 22 791 2570
E-mail : cumberlands@who.int

Alice Ghent
Bulletin of the World Health Organization
Geneva, Switzerland
Office: +41 22 791 1498
E-mail : ghenta@who.int

Dr Pramil N Singh
School of Public Health
Loma Linda University
California, United States of America.
Office: +1 909 936 1782
E-mail: psingh@llu.edu

Dr Douglas Bettcher
Director of the Tobacco Free Initiative
World Health Organization
Geneva, Switzerland
Office: +41 22 791 4253
E-mail: bettcherd@who.int