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Saturday, July 10, 2010

Movies and TV influence use of tobacco in India
Publication: www.prurgent.com, Edition: Internet, Journalist: Bureau

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Bureau

July 8th 2010: A recent findings from a National Survey in India reveals that exposure to mass media may impact the use of tobacco in India which is a major source of illness and death. The study revealed that daily television and radio use is associated with higher likelihood of tobacco consumption amongst men and women, while daily newspaper use is related to lower likelihood of tobacco consumption.

The study focuses on understanding the extent to which mass media use is related to tobacco use in India, given that media use may expose the audience to both pro and anti-tobacco content. The data in this study clearly demonstrate that use of media is independently associated with tobacco use. More importantly, the differential associations of media types on tobacco use suggest that the content in the media types vary and that this content likely accounts for the differences in the associations. Different media genres are likely to play different roles in tobacco use. Advertising and entertainment media are more likely to be receptive to pro-tobacco content given the heavy promotion of tobacco use in advertising and incidence of smoking in movies.

Initial research in India had found that specific media content such as media advertising is associated with higher smoking rates and exposure to cigarette brand names or actors smoking on television have been found to be related to increased youth smoking in India At the same time, anti-smoking messages delivered through the mass media have been shown to reduce smoking in India Cultural traditions and social norms specific to India play an important role in tobacco use patterns. Contrary to most
developed nations, the use of chewing tobacco is widespread in India.

Dr Prakash C Gupta, Director,
Healis-Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health, said India is the second largest tobacco consumer in the world and is expected to claim 1.5 million lives annually by 2020. Studies such as these will help in creating awareness of the tobacco problem and help in finding solutions to curb tobacco consumption in India.

Ms. Padmini Somani, Director of Salaam Bombay Foundation said, “Actors and celebrities have always been admired and looked upon at, by the common man as role models, especially today’s youth who idealize and imitate them. Thus if celebrities could use their influence over the masses in a better way imagine the impact it would generate amongst youngsters about the ill effects of tobacco consumption”.

In conclusion, the research proved that mass media if used in the right way, can be successful in discouraging all forms of tobacco use. Exposure to newspaper coverage on tobacco issues has shown to be related to reduced smoking rates and higher levels of disapproval of smoking behaviors. Anti-tobacco mass media campaigns have also proved to be effective at reducing smoking rates and increasing the perceived harm from smoking. These campaigns are much stronger when media communications are combined with other strategies of tobacco control.

About Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health:
Healis - Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health is an organization dedicated to improving public health in India and other developing countries. Established on August 1, 2004 it is a leader in quality research in India. It conducts research specific to India’s unique social and cultural settings to help assess the health situation and to help guide health services and programs. It co-hosted the 14th World Conference on Tobacco or Health in collaboration with agencies of high repute during March 8-12, 2009. It has also played an instrumental role in fostering advocacy development and has actively engaged the media on health related issues. Healis works in collaboration with leading National and International Health and

Research organizations.