

Once upon a time... smoking began its decline among women in Spain

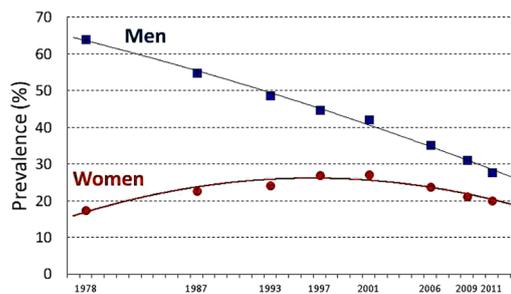
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Dear Editor,

The epidemiology of smoking is a changing topic: it is a dynamic process that was characterized in a “descriptive model” more than two decades ago by Lopez et al.¹ and recently updated by Thun et al.,² underlying its gender specificity. In Spain, the trend in the smoking prevalence by sex has been well characterized by reconstructing the historical prevalence rates from recent surveys³. In men, smoking prevalence was already above 50% in mid-1990 and slowly increased up to 60% in the 1970s, remaining stable up to 1980, when it started to decrease to 40% in 2000, and to 27.9% in 2011. In women, smoking prevalence was very low in 1940, slowly increasing during the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s (from 0.1% in 1940 to 6.0% in 1965), and sharply increased during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s till 26.5% in 1990. Women’s smoking prevalence levelled off at approximately 26% until the early 2000s, when it started to decrease slowly and reached 20% in 2011³⁻⁵.

While it is clear the curbing of smoking epidemic in women initiated in 2000, a recent paper⁶ using the same data, that from the Spanish National Health Interview Surveys, show a different trend. First and foremost, that paper is built on the statement that “In Spain, smoking rates are currently falling among men but they are still increasing among women”, a statement which is not true currently, but remains in the “collective imaginary”. Since more than a decade ago, smoking among Spanish women does not increase. We include here a chart with the available public data, including also the first Spanish Tobacco Survey from 1978 and the Spanish part of the European Health Survey of 2009 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Prevalence (%) of daily smoking among adult (> 15 years) Spanish men and women, 1978-2011 16



It is important to note that the influence of preventive policies in tobacco should not be restricted to price and warnings; since in Spain price and cost have complex relationships, caused by intensive smuggling in the 1990s and by the emergence of cheaper tobacco options (such as roll your own tobacco in recent years)⁷⁻⁹. Powerful policies such as the ban of television advertising in 1988¹⁰ and in other media thereafter or the smoke-free legislation in 2005 and 2010 are important in any analyses of the influence of tobacco control measures in smoking prevalence rates, both in men and women^{11,12}. A thorough review of the international and Spanish scientific literature on smoking and gender, including the above-mentioned and other papers^{4,13-15} may inspire and guide prospective authors across the exciting and changing topic of women and tobacco control.

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Letter to the Editor

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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