

Smoking Eats into Food Budgets

Here is yet one more way that smoking is bad for you: In developing nations, a parent's tobacco habit can take a substantial bite out of the family food budget. The finding is based on surveys of 33,000 households in rural Java, Indonesia, by Steven Block, Ph.D., an associate professor at the Fletcher School, and Patrick Webb, Ph.D., a professor at the Friedman School. They found that the average family with at least one smoker spends 68 percent of its typically scarce income on food, 10 percent on tobacco and 22 percent on everything else. They compared this to the budget of the average non-smoking family, which spends 75 percent of its income on food. That reduced food budget seems to be enough to affect the health of the children. The study found that smokers' children tend to be slightly shorter for their ages than the children of nonsmokers, a sign that their diets were nutritionally inferior. "Smoking has a strong, albeit indirect, impact on child malnutrition via its displacement effect on food consumption," the researchers write. "Our results further suggest that the nutritional consequences of this effect could be mitigated by households substituting toward lower-quality calories as their cigarette expenditures increase." The World Health Organization estimates that annual worldwide deaths from tobacco-related illness were almost 5 million per year in 2000, a figure that is projected to rise to 10 million per year by 2030. Seventy percent of these illnesses are expected to be in developing countries. The study was published in the October issue of the journal *Economic Development and Cultural Change*.