

Editorial

Smog the New Unfortunate Reality in Decreasing Life Spans of Pakistani Population: A Catastrophe Public Health Concern

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The air pollution that is currently engulfing Pakistan is a public health emergency. Pakistan's "smog season" begins in the fall and early winter and seems to be getting worse every year. Lahore and other cities in the region frequently rank among the worst places in the world for air quality.¹ According to a University of Chicago study, the consequences of the smog will shorten people's lives in Lahore by an average of seven years. The Punjab administration acted decisively after the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Lahore reached a concerning peak of 409 in November.²

Smog can irritate the airways, which makes respiratory conditions more likely to occur. It has a major impact on the emergence of diseases like lung cancer, bronchitis, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Furthermore, because the air contaminants affect blood vessel function, smog has a role in cardiovascular illnesses. Smog is a contributing factor to environmental risks, including river acidification and the ensuing decrease in soil nutrients. It also inhibits plant growth and raises the possibility of acid rain. Smog-related poor air quality and reduced vision make for difficult driving conditions, increasing the likelihood of traffic accidents.³

According to guidelines set forth by the World Health Organization (WHO), 24-hour average exposures to particulate matter (PM) 2.5 should not exceed 15 micrograms per cubic meter on more than three or four days per year, and annual average concentrations should not exceed five micrograms per cubic meter. The analysis projects that if current pollution levels continue, people of Punjab, Islamabad, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will see an average drop in life expectancy of 3.7 to 4.6 years.⁴

The National Clean Air Policy was introduced by Pakistan Ministry of Climate Change. By implementing interventions in the transportation, industry, waste management, agricultural, and home sectors, it seeks to minimize harmful emissions within the next ten years. The initiative's specific goals include eliminating open burning in the agricultural sector, ending open burning of waste, replacing wood stoves and biomass cooking with cleaner, more fuel-efficient cooking and heating methods, getting rid of the worst-emitting cars and enforcing Euro fuel standards in the transportation sector, and appropriately regulating industry emissions.⁵

The public sector has to develop public awareness campaigns regarding the harmful effects of smog through internet media. News channels can also be used to alert people to the dangers of smog. The government should concentrate on acting and establishing significant industry measures to reduce the harmful and catastrophic effects of smog. This is crucial time to declare a 'National Smog Emergency'.

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