Case study

Smoking in China

Smoking has become part of the culture in China. Offering cigarettes is an easy way to make a friend, solidify a bond or ease an introduction. Cigarettes are given as wedding gifts, presented to guests along with snacks at parties and left as offerings on the graves of men who have died of lung cancer. Many characters on television and film are heavy smokers.

The facts

- China produces more tobacco than any other country.
- It has an estimated 350 million smokers – a third of the world’s smokers.
- Smokers represent 36% of the population, including 70% of all Chinese men but only 7% of women. Many of them have little knowledge of the facts about smoking or any awareness of the consequences they face.
- The average age at which boys start smoking has fallen from 15 in the 1990s to 11 in the 2000s. More and more girls are taking up smoking all the time. One 14-year-old girl, who smoked two packs of cigarettes a day, told the Washington Post, “We’re chimneys. We love it. It’s cool. It helps me study. And in the summer, it keeps mosquitoes away.”
- Over a million people die each year in China from tobacco-related disease, mainly in the 35–69 age group. China has the largest number of smoking-related deaths in the world. Researchers estimate that by 2025 2 million people a year could be dying from smoke-related health problems, rising to 3 million by 2050.