Tobacco control has made undoubted progress in the past decades, including wider implementation of tobacco control policies such as smoke-free legislation, health warning labels and advertising bans. Although these have contributed to a worldwide decrease in smoking prevalence, the number of smokers is still increasing. Moreover, there are still large socioeconomic inequalities in smoking in many world regions. Smoking is a persisting problem that has no simple solution.

For the future of tobacco control I am inspired by scholars such as Professor Marmot and Professor Meadows, and those building on their and similar theories, who point out that there are complex societal mechanisms underlying smoking, and that such complex problems should be approached from a systems perspective. This means that smoking should be considered a problem that emerges from a complex global system and can only be solved with approach that fundamentally changes this system. I discuss two examples of problems in tobacco control that I believe will benefit from a systems approach.

Tobacco cannot be regarded a solitary problem, separate from other societal problems. Smoking is increasingly concentrating in disadvantaged groups. Disadvantage drives smoking uptake, for example, through the intersection of smoker and class identities, and makes quitting more difficult, for example, due to chronic life-stressors. In turn, tobacco expenditure exacerbates poverty in low-income households, further reducing budgets for healthy foods and sport participation. Disadvantage, obesity and smoking are in part a result of the same system. Tobacco control therefore needs structural policies to ensure basic necessities such as housing, employment, a safe childhood and high-quality education for every person.

Smoking is the result of a global system, not just systems within countries. Many high-income countries have set goals to reach a smoke-free generation by a fixed date in the coming decades. New Zealand’s Smokefree Aotearoa 2025 Action Plan is a prime example of how these goals may be achieved, and I expect more countries will follow their lead. However, a consequence of increasingly strong policies in high-income countries is a shift in the tobacco industry’s activities towards middle-income countries. Fighting the tobacco industry globally, without taking a neo-colonialist/hegemonic approach, will be an important challenge for the coming years.

As a tobacco control researcher, I am motivated to contribute to these and other, smaller challenges for the future, in which I think an understanding of the system that drives smoking will be helpful.

**REFERENCES**

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