

Passive smoking kills 6,800 annually

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Roughly 6,800 people in Japan are estimated to die every year from lung cancer or heart disease caused by passive smoking, and more than half — around 3,600 — are exposed to secondhand smoke in their workplace, a research team said Tuesday.

About 4,600 of the victims are women, according to the team, which operates under the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry.

"Huge harm is done," said Yumiko Mochizuki, a senior researcher at the National Cancer Center. "The government and employers need to recognize it is their responsibility to protect the health of working people."

Studies by the team and international organizations have shown passive smoking increases the risk of lung cancer and heart disease by 20 to 30 percent. The team's findings are based on this increased risk.

Based on a 2005 survey, the research team estimates that among 76 million nonsmoking adults — 48 million women and 28 million men — 30 percent of the women and 6 percent of the men are exposed to passive smoking in their homes, and 20 percent of the women and 30 percent of the men in their workplaces. The figures include those exposed to secondhand smoke both at home and in the workplace.

The team found in another study that passive smoking caused some 8 percent of 18,000 female deaths and 1 percent of 49,000 male deaths from lung cancer, as well as 9 percent of 34,000 female deaths and 4 percent of 42,000 male deaths from ischemic heart disease, which reduces blood supply to the heart.

The total number of victims in this study came to 4,600 women and 2,200 men, of whom 1,800 women and the same number of men were exposed to secondhand smoke in their workplaces, according to the team.

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