Dear Sir,

Globally, 3 billion people depend on solid fuels, including biomass fuels, for the fulfillment of basic energy requirements. The use of these fuels in traditional stoves contributes significantly to indoor air pollution; this in turn impacts the health of all those who are exposed to such a polluted milieu for prolonged periods of time.\(^1\) Women and young children in developing countries are particularly at risk because they have to spend much of their time indoors; owing to the cultural, social and economic limitations that exist for these demographics in such societies.\(^2\)

Pakistan is a predominantly rural South Asian society of more than 160 million people.\(^3\) Owing to high inflation rate and paucity of awareness, more and more people in Pakistan are opting for cheaper biomass fuels to meet their energy requirements. According to data from the Pakistan Household Energy Study (HESS), biomass fuel accounted for 86% of the total household energy consumption in Pakistan in 1992 while wood fuel alone accounted for 54% of the total.\(^2\) In addition, the contribution of tobacco smoke to indoor pollution in Pakistan can not be overemphasized.\(^2\) The problem is further compounded by a lack of data that can quantify the exact magnitude of risk posed by existing levels of air pollution in Pakistani households and workspaces. Only a limited number of studies have attempted to explore the burden of disease in Pakistan being contributed by the unbridled use of biomass fuel.\(^4,5\)

Despite being one of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), achievement of environmental sustainability and reduction of air pollution in Pakistan has perhaps not been accorded the imperative attention that it deserves. The need of the hour is to revitalize this issue and place it a higher position on the national and public health agenda. Environment-friendly strategies to curtail indoor air pollution levels in both households and workspaces should be devised. Research needs to be conducted to ascertain the levels of indoor air pollution in Pakistan along with their impact on health; all subsequent planning should, therefore, be evidence-based. Awareness among the population should be reinforced with carefully tailored media campaigns. An effort should be made to offer acceptable, affordable and energy efficient alternatives to biomass fuels.

REFERENCES

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