EDITORIAL

You need 'empower' (along with the other one) to make the world truly smoke-free

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Since the adoption of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control by the World Health Assembly in 2003, the number of countries implementing smoke-free laws at the national or subnational levels has dramatically increased. The latest report from the World Health Organization indicates that from just 4 in 2004, the number has shot up to 55 in 2016, covering almost 1.5 billion people in the world from the ills of secondhand smoke.¹ In 2008, the MPOWER Package, a policy package intended to assist countries in implementing effective interventions to reduce the demand for tobacco, was launched with six evidence-based components: Monitoring tobacco use and prevention policies, Protecting people from tobacco smoke, Offering help to quit tobacco use, Warning about the dangers of tobacco, Enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship and Raising taxes on tobacco use.² Smoke-free laws fall under 'P'—countries are evaluated in terms of coverage (number of public places which are to be smoke-free) and level of compliance.

It is without doubt that these initiatives have had a tremendous impact.^{3–5} Nevertheless, people smoking nonchalantly under big 'no-smoking' signs are still not an uncommon sight in many parts of the world (I have myself seen this). This brings us to the second monitoring indicator under 'P'—compliance. Ahuja et al. draw our attention to compliance in their mixed-methods study on the enforcers of anti-tobacco laws in India, the police officers, in this issue of *Public Health Action*.

When we witness non-compliance with the law, we tend to problematise the issue in terms of those people who do not abide with what has been legislated, and as qualitative researchers, try to understand the reasons why. Ahuja et al.'s study is unique in that the authors question something many of us usually take for granted—that laws are pointless unless they are prop-

erly implemented. Ahuja et al.'s study, although local in setting, is well-structured and carefully written, and shows that if there are many reasons why people decide not to comply with the law, there are just as many reasons why people do not or cannot enforce it. After all, law enforcement is just another human activity, no more or less fragile, and equally likely to be influenced by societal norms, beliefs, cultural thinking and individual motivations, as obedience to the law.

The implications of the study are two-fold; first, the authors conclude that 'P' alone is not sufficient in reducing the prevalence of tobacco use and that India needs to strengthen other existing tobacco control laws—the 'O', 'W', 'E' and 'R's. Second, they also stress that actions are needed so that 'P' itself can be properly implemented. For this to happen, what is needed is the empowerment of police officers, not just with the administrative authority to carry out their duties, but with the knowledge and confidence that the law they are enforcing is for the good of the people, including themselves. MPOWER is good—let us not forget that empowerment is often at the base of any fundamental change.

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