

'In '22, oral cancer deaths caused India \$5.6bn loss'

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Mumbai: While it's well known that oral cancer kills 50,000 Indians and affects another one lakh every year, little is known about its impact on the Indian economy.

In a first-of-its kind study, doctors from Tata Memorial Centre have worked out that the country lost \$5.6 billion in 2022, due to the economic impact of oral cancer alone. This works out to 0.18% of the GDP, said their research paper published in the latest edition of 'Head & Neck Journal', an indexed medical publication "on the sciences and specialties of head and neck".

DEATH IN 55% CASES DIA

➤ **1 lakh** new oral cancer cases are reported every year followed years to

➤ **50,000** lives are lost to oral cancer every year burde

➤ Tobacco and areca nut increase the risk of oral cancer



➤ In India, as youngsters use tobacco and areca nut, there is a high burden of people under 50 with oral cancer

➤ Tata Memorial Hospital

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Oral cancer is the most common malignancy in India, accounting for over 30% of all cancer cases. “Not only is it common, it’s also the most preventable form of cancer. One cannot prevent, say, cancer of the brain or bone tissues, but prevention and early detection of oral cancer is possible,” said Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi, director of ACTREC and an author of the study.

Such estimates underline the need for better public health policies, including screening, to reduce the burden of disability, death and economic burden associated with oral cancer in India.

The study’s lead author, TMC assistant professor Dr Arjun Singh, said 671 years were lost to early (29.8%) and advanced cancers (70.2%). “Considering the retirement age in India being 62 years, 91% of the deaths or uncurable recurrence of cancers were in the premature age groups, with a median age of 41.5 years,” he said. For the study, the TMC team followed 100 oral cancer patients under their care for three years, recording aspects of their treatment as well as their professional contributions.

The team thus worked out the economic losses due to the premature death of a single oral cancer patient, and then extrapolated it to the oral cancer burden. According to the paper, the loss of productivity to society was Rs 31 lakh per early-stage case and Rs 72 lakh for every advanced-stage cancer case. The economic loss due to the

death of a female oral cancer patient was worked out at Rs 57 lakh while that of a male cancer patient resulted in Rs 72 lakh.

As Indians start using tobacco and areca nuts at a younger age, oral cancers tend to develop in the youth as well. “This leads to devastating consequences for individuals, families, society and the economy. Tailored prevention policies that target this young age group are needed to be implemented. Screening and early detection strategies among high-risk groups need to be prioritised,” said the study.

TMC director Dr Sudeep Gupta said, “As per latest GLOBOCAN statistics, the proportion of deaths from oral cancer were 55% of the oral cancers diagnosed, making it a real public health crisis. The gross lack of awareness, fear, and misconceptions surrounding oral cancer lead to a large number of cases being diagnosed at a late-stage, contributing to high mortality rates.”