

Over \$46 billion lost to premature cancer deaths in BRICS economies, UN research finds

31 January 2018 – Over \$46 billion lost to premature cancer deaths in BRICS economies, UN research finds. Premature deaths as a result of cancer is costing major emerging economies tens of billions of dollars a year, a new United Nations health study has found, underlining the need for context-specific strategies for both prevention as well as treatment for those suffering from the disease.

The economic impact of cancer in fast-developing economies not only underlines the high cost of the disease in terms of the lives it claims and the impact on the economy, but also highlights the “[urgency of tackling preventable cancers in these countries](#),” said the study’s lead author, Alison Pearce.

Published in the medical journal *Cancer Epidemiology*, the [study](#) led by the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) cancer research centre reveals that the total cost of lost productivity because of premature cancer mortality for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – collectively known as BRICS countries – was \$46.3 billion in 2012 (the most recent year for which cancer data was available for all these countries).

These countries together account for more than 40 per cent the world’s population and a quarter of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, these countries are also home to 42 per cent of the global cancer deaths.

“Although they have diverse levels of wealth, and health indicators, the BRICS countries have all undergone particularly rapid demographic and economic growth,” noted the WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in a news release announcing the findings.

Each of the BRICS countries has a distinct cancer profile, and therefore a tailored approach to national cancer control policy is required. WHO IARC

These countries are all affected by infection-related cancers as well as cancers associated with changing lifestyles such as changes in diet, lack of physical activity, obesity and reproductive patterns.

“Yet each of these countries has a distinct cancer profile, and therefore a tailored approach to national cancer control policy is required,” added IARC.

The largest productivity loss at \$28 billion was recorded in China, a country particularly affected by liver cancer, with hepatitis B virus infections and exposure to aflatoxins primary factors for the loss.

Lifestyle-related risk factors in Russia, South Africa and Brazil – high consumption of alcohol, smoking and rapidly increasing obesity, respectively, added to the factors causing losses, noted the study.

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Director of WHO IARC

In India, the use of chewing tobacco was a leading cause of economic loss due to premature mortality from cancers of the lip and oral cavity.

Policies to influence lifestyle changes and reduce cancer risk are, therefore, critical, highlights IARC.

“The study demonstrates the economic importance of targeted primary prevention activities embedded in national cancer control policies. Focusing on tobacco control, vaccination programmes, and cancer screening, combined with access to adequate cancer treatment, would yield significant health and economic gains for the BRICS countries,” said Christopher Wild, the Director of IARC.

“Investing in evidence-based preventive interventions as a part of national cancer control plans is not only cost-effective and life-saving but also a powerful lever for sustainable economic development.”