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Public Discussion at AUA: "Feminization of the Smoking Epidemic in Armenia: Is This Unavoidable?"



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YEREVAN - On Thursday, April 6, 2006, a distinguished panel of speakers convened to address the issue of the feminization of smoking in Armenia and to both World Health Day and Mother's Day.

Dr. Narine Movsisyan -- ArmPHA Tobacco Control Project Director and Project Coordinator at the Center for Health Services Research and Development, American University of Armenia -- focused on troubling new trends in the smoking epidemic: initiation of smoking by girls at younger ages and diminishing differences in female smoking between rural and urban areas. She also noted, "The tobacco industry's aggressive and misleading marketing to young females is one of the most important factors in the growth of the epidemic."

Among the distinguished members of the panel was Hranush Hakobyan -- President of the Armenia Branch of the International Women's Association, Chair of the Standing Committee on Sci-

ence, Education, Culture and Youth at the National Assembly, and the author of the tobacco control law. Ms. Hakobyan emphasized, "We need to explain to people that smoking is not only harmful to health, but it is also a sign of ignorance. Smoking leads to a slow death: why live with smoking if one can live his/ her life with dignity."

Dr. Anna Grigoryan -- Team Leader, Democracy and Social Reform Office, USAID -- highlighted several harmful effects of smoking on women and presented the health education components of health projects supported by USAID in a number of marzes across Armenia. Dr. Grigoryan mentioned, "Studies have shown a strong association between smoking during pregnancy and the risk of invasive meningitis during early childhood, low birth-weight, and premature birth. Additionally, nicotine weakens the effect of cancer drugs. An article in the latest issue of the Proceedings of the U.S. National Academy of Sci-

ence reports that the level of nicotine in the blood of the average smoker interferes with the actions of anti-cancer drugs on tumor cells."

The panel was hosted by the College of Health Sciences (CHS) of the American University of Armenia (AUA) and organized by the Armenian Public Health Alliance (ArmPHA) -- a consortium of the Armenian Public Health Association, the Armenian Public Health Union, and AUA, with support from the OSI Assistance Foundation. The distinguished panel of speakers also included Nora Hakobyan, Chair, Republican Women Council; Anahit Haytayan, Journalist, "Hayastani Hanrapetutyun" daily; Eleonora Manandyan, President, "New Armenia" NGO; Karine Movsisyan, President of Goris Youth Union; and Hayastan Stepanyan, Legal Expert, Urban Foundation.