


Tobacco use is taking a high toll on the Indians



 Tobacco

According to the World Health Organization, tobacco use kills more than seven million globally. With nearly 270 million adults, above the age of 15 years, using tobacco in so India, the death toll due to tobacco use in the country is more than one million every cigarette smoking is the biggest killer, for India and most of the neighbouring countries smokeless tobacco (SLT) form is the larger part of the tobacco use burden. According Tobacco Survey India Report, 2017, one in every five Indian is hooked to SLT. Among used tobacco products are SLT i.e. khaini (8.5 crore) and gutkha (5.1 crore). Amongst commonly used are SLT i.e. betel quit (2 crore), oral application (2 crore) and khaini (1.

SLT causes several health problems for its users. SLT can cause oral and other cancer diseases and heart disease. In India, the use of SLT remains the dominant cause of tobacco including oral cancer. SLT not only causes adverse health effects but is also responsible burden. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare report, on the health contributed 91% of the total economic burden of Rs 1,04,500 crore in the year 2011. However females was much higher at 29 per cent for SLT. If one considers only the direct medical costs attributable to SLT increased substantially to 66 per cent. In addition, the average of SLT has doubled to Rs 12.8/- in 2017 compared to 2010. With almost 20 crore SLT users in household expenditure, exposing poor and vulnerable families to further poverty use which otherwise could be used in essentials like education, food and milk for children.

SLT use is also responsible for creating a huge amount of solid and non-bio-degradable waste. Tobacco cultivation impacts the environment in many ways, e.g. tobacco growing leads to depletion of soil and leads to soil erosion, deforestation, disturbance in patterns of bio-diversity in the forest, and ecological damage due to deforestation. Disposal of tobacco-related waste and litter is an environmental burden due to tobacco use. Invoking the principle of 'Polluter pays' the Government of Karnataka directed the tobacco manufacturers in the state against the use of plastic packaging. The Supreme Court upheld the order and as a result, the Ministry of Environment and Forest amended Plastic Waste Management and Handling) Rules, 2011 to prohibit the use of plastic materials in sachets for storing tobacco and pan masala.

Taking further steps to prevent the use of SLT, the Indian government issued a notification under the Food and Standards law stating that food products must not contain any substance which is harmful to health. The regulation prohibited tobacco and nicotine from being used as ingredients in food products. A ban on sale and manufacture of gutkha across the country with Madhya Pradesh being the first to implement the ban.

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare suggested state governments to take steps to curb SLT use in the country by issuing a prohibitory order against manufacture and sale of SLT products. The state of Assam became the first state to issue a blanket ban on all SLT products. Several states, including Bihar, Maharashtra and Mizoram have since then issued strict orders concerning ban on SLT products.

Evidence suggests that any tobacco control regulation, unless comprehensive, does not meet the public health objective. To make sure that the intended objectives of gutkha ban and the prohibition of SLT products, all stakeholders must work together for a comprehensive ban on manufacture and sale of SLT products across the country. Provision for accessible and affordable cessation services for all SLT users is the first step towards meeting this objective.

SLT use mixed with areca nut is a common practice in India and stated in the beginning of the 20th century. The two most commonly used forms of SLT have areca nut as a common ingredient. Areca nut is known as having class one carcinogen properties i.e. cancer-causing properties, besides respiratory and other health effects. The combination of tobacco and areca nut put their users, mostly women and children, vulnerable sections of the society, to a completely preventable risk of disease and death.

We the people of this country should enter into another final combat, this time against tobacco, to free ourselves free from the clutches of this ill-habit.

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