

Inside

Page 2

Illicit trade: Can science tackle it?
FSFW severs ties with nicotine industry

Page 3

'Vaping Guide' for health and social service providers

Page 4

E-cigarettes not a gateway to smoking, study finds
ARI urges comprehensive plan for a smoke free Pakistan

Quitting smoking a challenge

Muhammad Haider Mehmood, 26, a media monitor, started smoking back in 2015. He was soon addicted to the habit of using 20 cigarettes a day. His health started deteriorating as smoking resulted in chronic health issues. "I am suffering from hypertension and breathing issues because of smoking," he told Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) in Blue Area, Islamabad. He tried many times to quit smoking but he was unable to do so. "I could not give up," he added.

According to estimates, there are 31 million tobacco users in Pakistan. Of them, 17m are cigarette smokers. Smoking causes 160,189 deaths a year in the country while the total cost of smoking-related diseases and deaths was Rs 615.07 billion, equal to 1.6% of Pakistan's GDP in 2019. On the other hand, the revenue generated from the cigarette industry was 135 billion in 2020-2021.

Young and energetic, Haider was introduced by friends to smoking. After starting smoking, he has used many brands of cigarettes. "I have tried Dunhill, Gold Leaf, Capstan and Dunhill Pakistani."

At first, he used smoking as a fashion but with time, he realized that smoking had negative effects on his health as he was suffering from serious health issues. "For me, hypertension was a serious health issue as I was fat," he said.

According to the National Health Services (NHS) of England, smoking, like high blood pressure, will cause your arteries to narrow. This can increase your blood pressure. If your arteries get blocked it can cause a heart attack or stroke.

If you smoke and have high blood pressure, your arteries will narrow much more quickly, and your risk of heart or lung disease in the future is dramatically increased.

Haider said he asked friends and elders about smoking cessation methods. They advised him to use gum and handle cigarette cravings by diverting his attention. He has tried but was unable to give up. "These methods failed to work," he thinks. Answering a question, he said he was unaware of any

smoking cessation clinic in the country.

According to the ARI, smokers do not know where they should seek assistance for quitting smoking. In Pakistan, less than 3pc smokers successfully quit smoking in a year because of a lack of smoking cessation services.

Haider said he visited a doctor to overcome his health issues.

The doctor advised him to quit smoking as he was facing smoking-induced diseases. Haider recalls that the doctor had given him two types of tablets and advised him to use them for two weeks. Unfortunately, he has forgotten the names of the tablets. He consulted the doctor twice but the medicine did not work. "I used the tablets for 25 days but it did not help in giving up smoking," he said.

After several failed attempts, Haider continued to smoke cigarettes. However, the higher prices of cigarettes after an increase in taxes on cigarettes, have compelled him to shift from the expensive brand 'Dunhill' to 'Capstan', a cheap one. "I do not have any option except to use a cheap brand." He spends Rs. 15,000 on cigarette smoking a month.

Many developed countries like England and Sweden have embraced less harmful alternatives like e-cigarettes to help adult smokers and cut down smoking prevalence in their countries and this strategy has worked for them. In Pakistan, they are being used in a regulatory vacuum.

According to the National Health Services (NHS) of England, e-cigarettes are less harmful as they do not burn tobacco because all smoking-related diseases are caused by smoke that arises from burning tobacco.

Haider believes, willpower is the best way to quit smoking but most people need help in their efforts to achieve this goal. He urged the government to establish tobacco cessation clinics across Pakistan; ensure the provision of accessible cessation services and hiring of experts to help adult smokers in their efforts to give up smoking.

Illicit trade: Can science tackle it?

A round table discussion on the "Effective methods of combating illicit trade: science and international practice" took place in Kyiv on November 13, featuring experts from Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Turkey and Azerbaijan. The event gathered participants both off – and on-line. These are the countries facing shared challenges, such as high tobacco consumption, particularly among men. For instance, in Georgia, male smoking is the highest in Europe, at 57%.

The regulatory decisions of these countries aim to increase the cost of legal cigarettes and nicotine-containing products. However, these efforts are complicated by the tolerance of the illicit tobacco trade. People who smoke continue to have easy access to cheap cigarettes, undermining their attempts to quit.

In 2021-2023 experts from the NGO "Healthy Initiatives" conducted research on illicit trade in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kazakhstan searching for solutions based on science. The findings have indicated quite a significant distribution of illegal products. Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, "Healthy Initiatives" worked closely with various stake holders in Ukraine to develop a Road Map on Combating the Illicit Trade which now is to be reconsidered. Today illegal cigarette packs in Ukraine and Georgia are about 70% cheaper than legal ones. Telegram channels, illicit street vendors, and duty-free shops have become primary

channels for these products. Experts recommend a complete ban on the production and sale of domestically produced tobacco through duty-free shops in Ukraine. By comparing production and sales volumes, the experts revealed glaring violations: a significant portion of the products intended for duty-free "disappears" without a trace on the route to stores, and fictitious purchases occur within duty-free territories. As an illustration, the average purchase in a duty-free store amounted to 30 packs or more, far exceeding the norm for transporting tobacco across the border, which is limited to no more than 2 packs. This exemplifies how tax and excise tax evasion schemes work.

An analysis comparing the taxation of a ton of tobacco and raw material waste from various manufacturers revealed significant variations, indicating illegal production in certain enterprises.

Cross-border illicit trade plays a significant role, with channels from Romania and Ukraine competing for consumers from Moldova. Concerns also arise regarding the growth of tobacco cultivation in Moldova and Ukraine and the establishment of artisanal production.

Summarizing the discussion results, representatives from a number of international think tanks, business associations, and public organizations agreed to continue exchanging data and best practices in the fight against illegal trade.

<https://hi-ua.org/tpost/junclx0811-illicit-trade-can-science-tackle-it>

FSFW severs ties with nicotine industry

A research foundation originally set up by Philip Morris International (PMI) (PM.N) will no longer accept any funding from the nicotine industry as it seeks to win credibility with tobacco control advocates, its CEO said. The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World was set up in 2017 with support from PMI, which pledged to provide tens of millions of dollars every year for 12 years to keep it running.

PMI provided a final grant of \$122.5 million in September, equivalent to around three and a half years of funding based on the amount it pledged to the foundation annually between 2022 and 2029.

The foundation will now rebrand and find new funders from outside of the industry, Cliff Douglas said in an interview.

Douglas, a long-time tobacco control advocate who joined the foundation in October, said he wants to see it re-established as a credible actor in ending smoking.

"Any scepticism around our independence can be laid to rest," he said.

Douglas pointed to a number of tobacco control advocates who have sounded positive about the foundation's new direction. However, other groups remained sceptical about whether it can reset its image.

"Whether it's true or not, [Douglas] will be seen as pursuing PMI's agenda, not that of public health," said Deborah Arnott, chief executive of UK health charity ASH, adding the foundation's role was "irredeemably tainted" by its PMI



funding.

Yolonda Richardson, president and CEO of the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, said it was "ludicrous" for the foundation to claim independence after accepting a hefty payment from PMI. Its stated aim still aligned with the company's interests, she added.

The foundation says its mission is to end smoking including via research aimed at helping smokers quit or move to alternative products.

The promotion of smoking alternatives for those unable to quit - known as a harm reduction approach and backed by some governments and the tobacco industry - is controversial. The World Health Organisation says vapes, for example, are harmful to health. Others worry that new users could become addicted to nicotine.

PMI said the split was mutual, and wished the foundation success.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/formerly-philip-morris-backed-foundation-severs-ties-with-nicotine-industry-2023-11-27/>

'Vaping Guide' for health and social service providers

On November 16, the United Kingdom's National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT), released: "Vaping: a guide for health and social care professionals." It combines a summary of best available evidence with recommendations for how practitioners should act on this knowledge. It's the latest iteration of guidance that NCSCT first published in 2014, under the title "Electronic cigarettes: a briefing for stop smoking services."

An early statement of purpose is instructive and inclusive: "This briefing provides guidance on how to support those who smoke to switch to vaping, either as a means of stopping smoking or to reduce the harm of continued smoking should they feel currently unable or unwilling to quit," it states. "Abstinence from nicotine is not necessarily a priority, the most urgent priority is to support people to switch away from smoking tobacco."

The document represents "the most up-to-date research evidence-based guide for health and social care professionals," Dr. Kirstie Soar, one of its coauthors, told Filter.

Soar—who is also trial manager for London South Bank University's Project SCeTCH, evaluating vapes for smoking cessation among unhoused people—was responsible for updating the guide with new material from contributors. "Importantly," she said, "it also places people who smoke and people who vape at the center of the publication." Two trustees at the New Nicotine Alliance, a British tobacco harm reduction consumer group, were asked to review the document to make sure it reflected lived experience, and it was Soar's job to address and reconcile the reviewers' comments.

The guide has a foreword from Neil O'Brien, a politician in the UK's governing Conservative Party, who at the time the guide was written was parliamentary under-secretary of state at the Department of Health and Social Care. "I am enormously proud of the leadership that England has shown in supporting smokers to quit," he writes, of what has been seen as one of the world's most vape-friendly countries.

"Our policy has two goals—sometimes in tension but never in conflict—to maximize the opportunities to help smokers to quit smoking whilst preventing young people and non-smokers from starting vaping," he continues. "They are never in conflict because they share the ultimate mission of reducing harm and improving health."

The 55-page guide comes across as significantly more pro-vaping than the foreword. It draws upon studies and

resources including data from Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), the 2022 evidence review by King's College London for the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, the University College London Smoking Toolkit Study, and the 2022 Cochrane Review.

"The evidence isn't cherry-picked, but based on the considerable amount of research which has been conducted over the last 15-plus years," Soar said.

On the controversial issue of youth vaping, this evidence brings emphases that bear no resemblance to media and political outcry. For example, the guide notes, "vaping in adolescents is mainly amongst those who currently smoke or used to smoke."

"While it is preferable for young people to neither smoke nor vape, when assessing the risks, priority should be given to supporting young people not to smoke," the guide concludes. The guide also cites plentiful evidence to refute persistent myths—like "popcorn lung," the claim that nicotine impacts adolescent brain development, and the notion that harms of vaping are comparable with those of smoking.

"This evidence is reliable, unbiased and peer-reviewed research, rather than hearsay, anecdotal reports or sensational media stories," Soar said. Some high-profile British medical professionals have helped fuel public concerns over vaping. But Soar doesn't see these examples as typical. "I think health care professionals, certainly those in the UK, generally do agree on the benefits of vaping relative to continued smoking," she said, "and have seen first-hand how [vapes] benefit their patients as

an aid to quitting smoking."

The judgment of some providers, she acknowledged, is affected when the youth-vaping narrative drowns out the bigger picture: "Health care professionals must assess the relative versus the absolute risk of vapes in the context of tobacco smoking."

"Smoking tobacco (not the nicotine) remains the biggest cause of health harms (and indeed costs) and regulated vapes can help significantly reduce these harms," Soar said. "Of course, if you don't smoke, then I wouldn't recommend anyone to start vaping, but if you smoke, then you could certainly benefit from switching."

Health and social services far beyond the UK would certainly benefit if providers gave the NCSCT guide a careful read.

https://filtermag.org/vaping-guide-health-social-professionals/?fbclid=IwAR2SuE6HCfeN-0KwTfZmqe9DGOTkrDI217BuGw-n_8Hd9CGAO9uUJ3NRBuk



E-cigarettes not a gateway to smoking, study finds

A new study led by Queen Mary University of London and funded by the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) reiterated that on the contrary to what the “Gateway Theory” claims, if anything vaping acts as a gateway out of not into smoking.

The research letter published in JAMA Internal Medicine explored smoking and vaping patterns in young adults, offering insights into the relationship between the two behaviors. Led by researchers at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) who analyzed data from the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) Study, the study revealed a significant shift in tobacco use among young adults, with more individuals initiating nicotine intake through vaping rather than traditional cigarettes.

Discussing the study, Dr. Sarah Jackson, Principal Research Fellow at the UCL Tobacco and Alcohol Research Group, emphasized the concern about vaping acting as a potential gateway to smoking among young individuals. However, recent studies suggest a different trend, indicating that vaping may be actually displacing smoking, steering those who might have chosen smoking towards a less harmful option.

The research letter highlighted that in the last decade, a significant proportion of young adults have consumed nicotine. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift away from smoking tobacco: a highly lethal habit, towards vaping, which science has shown us poses only a fraction of the risks associated with smoking. Dr. Jackson suggests that this shift could have net public health benefits. Professor Caitlin Notley from the University of East Anglia noted that the study aligns with evidence from England, where historically low tobacco smoking rates coincided with increased vaping among young people. This trend corresponds with the widespread availability of disposable vapes and nicotine-salt based e-liquids.

The reduction in smoking is seen as a positive development for public health, emphasizing the importance of clearly communicating that vaping is a reduced harm alternative to smoking. However, added Professor Notley, there is widespread confusion across the US, partly stems from the fact that vapes are incorrectly classified as tobacco products. This naturally leads to misperceptions about the relative harms of vaping compared to smoking.

Countless previous studies have come to the same conclusion, however claims about an alleged gateway to smoking and/or substance use, have never stopped resurfacing. Another recent study, is the most comprehensive to date on the topic. In order to carry out an investigation at the population level, the research team examined associations of vape use and sales, with smoking rates and cigarette sales across different age and socioeconomic groups. The researchers then proceeded to compare smoking prevalence over time in countries with contrasting regulations of these products, such as the UK and the US, versus Australia.

In line with previous findings, the results indicated that not only was there no gateway to smoking, but also that vaping products have actually facilitated smoking cessation and led to decreased smoking rates in countries where they are endorsed. In fact, as the rise in sales of heated tobacco products in Japan has coincided with a reduction in cigarette sales.

Moreover, the decrease in smoking prevalence in Australia appears to have slowed down in comparison to countries which have endorsed tobacco harm reduction. This deceleration is particularly evident among young individuals and in lower socioeconomic groups, and is significant when compared to both the UK and the US. Finally, cigarette sales have declined at a much quicker rate in the United Kingdom than in Australia.

https://www.vapingpost.com/2023/11/29/another-study-refutes-the-gateway-theory-stating-the-opposite-is-true/?fbclid=IwAR1E5YHjmJhwC_Wzm1giCIMc-JHdN7bZUwWk3ukZIMLGcrpARvTgSaoR8DM

ARI urges comprehensive plan for a smoke free Pakistan

Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) has asked Tobacco Control Cell (TCC) to hold wide ranging consultations and preparing a long-term plan for ending combustible smoking and making Pakistan smoke free.

“In the next ten years, eliminating combustible smoking from Pakistan is possible,” Arshad Ali Syed, Project Director ARI, said. He added smoking was still one of the few major threats to public health today.

He added that for successfully achieving the goal of a smoke free Pakistan, the most important initiative is the easy provision of facilities for smoking cessation. “If we want the rate of smoking to decrease in Pakistan, we must first help those smokers who could not get rid of this habit. It is necessary to provide smoking cessation services to such adult smokers. Access to smoking cessation services and facilities should be a basic human right.” Unfortunately, he said smoking cessation services are limited in Pakistan. Arshad said while many other factors play a role in this success, a major factor is the easy availability of less harmful alternative tobacco products commonly known as Tobacco Harm Reduction (THR). He said Pakistan should also review the THR as a part of the tobacco control efforts. “THR products should be sensibly regulated, keeping in view the risk they pose.”

Arshad maintained the focus of smoking control efforts in Pakistan was on reducing the smoking rate, while the rest of the world is planning and implementing its complete elimination. He said that the Tobacco Control Cell should initiate dialogue with all stakeholders, especially smokers, for the complete elimination of smoking from Pakistan.

Established in 2018, ARI is an initiative aimed at filling gaps in research and advocacy on ending combustible smoking in a generation. Supported by the Foundation for A Smoke-Free World (FSFW), ARI established the Pakistan Alliance for Nicotine and Tobacco Harm Reduction (PANTHR) in 2019 to promote innovative solutions for smoking cessation.

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