



Warning on every puff: Learning from Canada's innovative tobacco control strategy

Elakeya Udhaya^a, Snehasish Tripathy^b, Ankita Mathur^b, Vini Mehta^{b,*}, Luca Fiorillo^{b,c}

^a Prasanna School of Public Health, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Karnataka, 576104, India

^b Department of Dental Research Cell, Dr. D. Y. Patil Dental College and Hospital, Dr. D. Y. Patil Vidyapeeth, Pimpri, Pune 411018, India

^c Department of Biomedical and Dental Sciences, Morphological and Functional Images, University of Messina, 98100 Messina, Italy

1. Introduction

The global surge in tobacco consumption has led to an alarming public health crisis with profound health, social and economic consequences. The tobacco epidemic, which kills more than 8 million people a year worldwide, is one of the most significant risks to the health of everyone the world has ever encountered. Inhaling second-hand smoke causes about 1.3 million fatalities in non-smokers, yet tobacco use alone is directly accountable for more than 7 million deaths [1].

Undeniably, waterpipe tobacco, cigars, heated tobacco, bidis, and smokeless tobacco products—all forms of tobacco, whether smoked or chewed dice with death, and cigarette smoking is no exception. According to the American Lung Association, cigarettes contain 600 ingredients and release over 7000 chemicals when burnt. Sixty-nine of them are carcinogenic [2] and tobacco is the leading cause of preventable disease worldwide.

2. Canada's tobacco control initiative

In 2001, Canada was the first country to introduce the rule of putting pictorial warnings on cigarette packages (3). Now again, embarking on a trailblazing path, Canada took a bold and pioneering initiative to safeguard the well-being of their youth and non-smokers, diminishing tobacco's allure. Individual cigarettes in Canada will carry health warning messages like "poison in every puff" [4]. According to the Tobacco Products Appearance, Packaging, and Labelling regulations (TPAPLR), the warning messages will be changed periodically to maintain effectiveness [3] and raise awareness. The TPAPLR also established that a standard of at least 75% of the display surface of the cigarette pack should be covered by health pictorial warning labels. A qualitative research study found that warning on each cigarette made avoidant behaviour more difficult, created a negative image and was embarrassing [5]. Graphic cigarette warning label is an effective population-based smoking cessation intervention by creating a

heightened visual impact [6], and these innovative regulations align with the World Health Organization's framework of Tobacco Control.

3. Lessons for India's tobacco control strategy

This approach offers valuable lessons for India's tobacco control efforts. India is facing a severe public health challenge as a country with the second highest level of tobacco consumption worldwide with 267 million tobacco users [7–9]. The issue is more complicated in India than in any other country due to the easy availability of various smoking tobacco like cigarettes, hookah, bidi, e-cigarettes, and heat, not burn cigarettes [10]. The GATS (Global Adult Tobacco Survey) found that the average age of initiating tobacco is 17.8 years, with the highest usage among males [8] and smoking is the most popular method, exposing 38.7% of the population to second-hand smoke. Moreover, in regions like Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, where tobacco use is most prevalent, more than 29% of children have been exposed to second-hand smoke [11].

Beside this, it is revealed that there is a significant discrepancy between the excise tax income from tobacco products and expenditures linked with tobacco-related outcomes, with an estimated economic cost of 1% of the country's GDP in 2017–2018. Remarkably, for every INR100 received as excise tax, the country incurred INR 816. The lost household income due to hospitalization and services amounted to USD 957 million (INR 6181 crore). Direct medical costs amounted to USD 5.8 billion (INR 37344 crore), while direct non-medical costs amounted to USD 211 million (INR 1364 crore). The attributable costs of smoking and smokeless tobacco accounted for 74% and 26%, respectively. These findings showed that the costs associated with tobacco consumption go far beyond the revenue generated from tobacco product taxes, highlighting the urgent need for effective tobacco control measures [12].

Even though interventions like behavioural modification, group counselling, feedback, and nicotine replacement therapies have improved effectiveness on an individual level, health warning labels on

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [vini.mehta@statsense.in](mailto: vini.mehta@statsense.in) (V. Mehta).

Table 1
Rationale for establishing health warning labels on each cigarette.

Enhanced awareness	Health warnings on each cigarette give constant exposure to remind about the health risks associated with smoking.
Targeted Communication	Warnings directly on cigarettes ensure a strong visual impact even when the package is not present.
Reduce avoidant behaviour	The difficulty in ignoring warnings will reduce avoidant behaviour.
Social Disincentive	It may create a negative social impression among peers, grow self-consciousness and encourage them to think twice about their habits.
Positive Public Health Impact	Reduces tobacco consumption, saving lives and reducing disease burden.

each cigarette is a population-based intervention that will create a constant visual reminder on each puff, and create a sense of collective awareness, particularly among the youth. Frequent exposure to health warnings during every puff will trigger cognitive dissonance and motivate individuals to align their behaviour. The Initiative will make cigarettes a less attractive option among youth more susceptible to peer pressure. Additionally, it can lead to aversion conditioning, connecting the smoking behaviour with negative feelings making the act less enjoyable over time. Table 1 lists the rationale connected with cigarette labelling for warnings.

In conclusion, Policymakers may reduce the economic and health toll tobacco use imposes on India by implementing an integrated strategy incorporating pricing, awareness campaigns, readily available quitting services, education, tailored support, and health warnings on each cigarette by learning from Canada’s or other countries successful initiatives. This would help India live longer and healthier lives.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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