

The Indian ban on loose cigarettes

Jugal Kishore¹, Jagdish Kaur², Nancy Satpathy³, Pratap K. Jena⁴, Epari Venkatarao³

Dear Editor,

India is home to 266.8 million adult tobacco users, with two-thirds of cigarette smokers (21.89 million), one-sixth of bidi smokers (12.09 million), and one-fourth (50.09 million) of smokeless tobacco users buying their products in loose form¹. Article 16 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) aims to prevent minors from accessing tobacco by banning the sale of tobacco products in loose or small quantities. This prohibition is yet to be effectively enforced, as over 70% of tobacco products in India are still sold without proper packaging¹. Two in five school-going adolescents are purchasing loose cigarettes². Affordability and easy access to loose cigarettes aid in smoking initiation among youths, continued use among smokers, and reduced quit success rate³, making it a driver of the smoking epidemic in India. Additionally, the trade of loose cigarettes bypasses the restrictions set by legal provisions related to warning labels on cigarette packs and tobacco taxation. The counterargument for loose cigarettes, such as helping reduce overall cigarette consumption and gradual quitting⁴, is in contrast to the scientific evidence that tobacco in any amount is harmful to health³.

India's current anti-tobacco legislation Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003 is dynamic but does not prohibit the sale of cigarettes individually or in small (<20 cigarettes) packets⁵, as stipulated in Article 16 of the WHO FCTC⁶. However, at the sub-national level, out of 28 States and eight Union Territories (UTs), 16 States or UTs have banned the sale of loose tobacco products, directly or indirectly⁴. The latest recommendation in December 2022 by the Indian Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare to ban the sale of single sticks of cigarettes has received a lot of attention in the Indian media⁷.

According to the WHO Global Tobacco Control Report, as of 2019, about eight countries had implemented measures to restrict the sale of individual cigarettes⁸. In countries where the sale of single cigarettes is restricted, the tobacco industry tries to circumvent these measures by offering compact packets of cigarettes and other tobacco products that are more affordable and accessible than traditional packs. Singles provide a perverse incentive for vendors to extract additional profits⁹. Singles make it easier for the tobacco industry to promote new brands and do market research on consumers at the point of sale (POS)¹⁰.

The Pan-India recommendation to ban singles/loose tobacco products is a welcome milestone in India's tobacco control efforts. Considering the high burden of bidi smoking and smokeless tobacco in India, special focus should be given to bidi and smokeless tobacco retailing. In light of its significance in India's tobacco control efforts, it is imperative to prioritize the effective implementation of this policy.

AFFILIATION

1 Department Community Medicine, Vardhman Mahavir Medical College and Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi, India

2 Tobacco Free Initiative, World Health Organization Regional Office for South-East Asia, New Delhi, India

3 Department of Community Medicine, Institute of Medical Sciences and Sum Hospital, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan University, Bhubaneswar, India

4 School of Public Health, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Bhubaneswar, India

CORRESPONDENCE TO

Pratap K. Jena, KIIT School of Public Health, Campus-5, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, PIN-751024, India.

E-mail: drpratapiena@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1236-3103>

KEYWORDS

India, loose cigarettes, ban

Received: 28 August 2023

Revised: 14 September 2023

Accepted: 18 September 2023

REFERENCES

1. Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Global Adult Tobacco Survey GATS 2 India 2016-17. Accessed March 30, 2023. <https://ntcp.mohfw.gov.in/assets/document/surveys-reports-publications/Global-Adult-Tobacco-Survey-Second-Round-India-2016-2017.pdf>
2. India International Institute for Population Sciences, India Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS-4): Fact Sheet: India 2019. Accessed March 30, 2023. https://ntcp.mohfw.gov.in/assets/document/National_Fact_Sheet_of_fourth_round_of_Global_Youth_Tobacco_Survey_GYTS-4.pdf
3. World Health Organization. Tobacco: Key Facts. July 31, 2023. Accessed September 18, 2023. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>
4. Kapoor S, Mehra R, Yadav A, Lal P, Singh RJ. Banning loose cigarettes and other tobacco products in India: a policy analysis. *Asian Pac J Cancer Prev*. 2021;22(S2):51-57. doi:[10.31557/APJCP.2021.22.S2.51](https://doi.org/10.31557/APJCP.2021.22.S2.51)
5. Government of India. The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003. The Gazette of India. May 19, 2003. Accessed March 30, 2023. <https://odishapolice.gov.in/sites/default/files/PDF/COTPA.pdf>
6. World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Article 16: Sales to and by minors. April 19, 2021. Accessed March 30, 2023. <https://fctc.who.int/publications/m/item/article-16>
7. Ghosh S. Explained: The recommendation to ban the sale of single cigarettes. *The Hindu*. December 28, 2022. Accessed March 30, 2023. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/explained-the-recommendation-to-ban-the-sale-of-single-cigarettes/article66296332.ece>
8. World Health Organization. WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic 2019: offer help to quit tobacco use. July 25, 2019. Accessed March 30, 2023. <https://www.who.int/teams/health-promotion/tobacco-control/who-report-on-the-global-tobacco-epidemic-2019>
9. Shirane R, Smith K, Ross H, Silver KE, Williams S, Gilmore A. Tobacco industry manipulation of tobacco excise and tobacco advertising policies in the Czech Republic: an analysis of tobacco industry documents. *PLoS Med*. 2012;9(6):e1001248. doi:[10.1371/journal.pmed.1001248](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001248)
10. Gilmore AB, Fooks G, Drope J, Bialous SA, Jackson RR. Exposing and addressing tobacco industry conduct in low-income and middle-income countries. *Lancet*. 2015;385(9972):1029-1043. doi:[10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)60312-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)60312-9)

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have completed and submitted the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest and none was reported.

FUNDING

There was no source of funding for this research.

ETHICAL APPROVAL AND INFORMED CONSENT

Ethical approval was not required for this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created.

PROVENANCE AND PEER REVIEW

Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors.