

Smoking in Saudi Arabia and its Control Measures

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Abstract

Smoking is a big issue in today's world. According to a study, the government of Saudi Arabia is spending billions of dollars to counter the prevalence of smoking. New rules have been made and strategies formulated to curb smoking in cities, and the result is visible now. Different anti-smoking advertisements in the form of banners and posters can be seen in different parts of the kingdom. The aim of these banners and advertisements is to control smoking. Usually the themes of the banners are the same that they are having less social values comparatively the non-smokers. Their activities are much different from others and they are not comfortable with everyone and everywhere. Introducing new and very innovative banners are hanging and showing very clearly that smoking is very injurious for health.

This research provides valuable insight of the emergence of smoking as a severe health issue and how the government in Saudi Arabia is addressing this problem. A lot of articles and research papers were read and conclusions drawn to comment on the status of anti-smoking campaigns and how effective they are.

Keywords: Smoking, Anti-Smoking, Control measures.

Introduction

There are more than 15 billion cigarettes smoked a day around the world (World Health Organization; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)). According to an estimate, one in three adults smoke. Out of over 1 billion people smoking worldwide, about 80 percent of them live in low and middle-income countries. The total numbers of smokers worldwide are expected to increase each year (King, 2008). Anti-Smoking advertising is an important component of comprehensive tobacco control program, and are designed to counter pro-tobacco influences and increase pro-health messages. Throughout state, province or communities, these advertisements may promote smoking cessation as well as decrease the likelihood of initiation and they also have a strong influence on public support for tobacco control interventions (Hyland, et. al., 2006). It is understandable that tobacco companies are compelled to target the young men and women. Teenagers are their future consumers often highly impressionable and in some societies with significant disposable income. For any company where brand and consumption of their products are important, attracting younger members of society increases the chances of longer term lock-in. With the tobacco industry, ironically perhaps, as their products kill their customers (or as customers try to quit), they need to find newer consumers. Younger people will

take a longer time to die or quit, thus increasingly the likelihood of continued sales (Shah, 2008). Smoking is the main cause of behind the death of 3.38 million people worldwide, including 13,544 in Saudi Arabia, according to statistics published by the Saudi Charitable Society to Combat Smoking on its website (Ghafour, 2008).

Dr. Muhammad Al-Baddah, supervisor of the anti-smoking program at the Health Ministry in Saudi Arabia confirms that smoking in the Kingdom is growing at an alarming scope. The cigarette imports in the country were SR1.7 billion in 2005 and the economic losses caused by smoking were SR25 billion in the five years from 2005 to 2010. The majority of Saudi smokers who took part in a recent survey said they started practicing the damaging habit as a result of the influence of friends. Some participants (8.4 percent) said it was the family impression that made them smokers while 5.9 percent blamed work pressure for smoking. The survey showed that the majority of smokers in the Kingdom are unmarried young men and women with one-third of them being students (Ghafour, 2008).

The total population of the Kingdom is 26.5 million according to a July 2012 estimate by Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), US. It is estimated that about a quarter of Saudi Arabia's residents smoke. Smokers in Saudi Arabia spend more than SR5 billion to buy some 40,000 tons of tobacco yearly, which is alike to the cost of the Kingdom's import of basic food items such as rice. This scary fact sheds light on the severity of direct economic losses incurred by the Kingdom as a result of smoking, not to mention other losses related to the high cost of the treatment of serious diseases associated with smoking (Fakeeh, 2011).

According to Dr. Mohammed Albar, Director of Medical Ethics Center IMC, Jeddah, the death from smoking is 23000 per annum. The negative effects of tobacco and smoking are (Shah, 2008);

- Smoking kills
- Smoking exacerbates poverty
- Smoking contributes to world hunger by diverting prime land away from food production
- Tobacco production damages the environment
- Tobacco reduces economic productivity
- While the Tobacco industry may employ people, this can be considered an example of “wasted labor”, capital and resources.

The world's premier health organization World Health Organization (WHO, 2008) is quite blunt about the impacts of tobacco and smoking. According to it, Tobacco is the second major cause of death in the world. It is currently responsible for the death of 1 in 10 adults and is the leading preventable causes of all deaths. Tobacco kills up to half of its regular users. In 2005, tobacco caused 5.4 million deaths which was 1 in every 6 seconds. If current smoking patterns continue, it will cause some 8 million deaths each year by 2030. Tobacco caused 100 million deaths in the 20th century. At current trends up to one billion will die in the 21st century. An estimated 1.3 billion people smoke and 84 percent of all smokers live in developing and transitional economy countries. Most people start smoking before the age of 18; almost a quarter of these individuals begin using tobacco before the age of 10. Approximately 48 percent of all men smoke compared to 10.3 percent of women.

According to Saudi Gazette, the women smoker ratio in the kingdom is 5.7 percent. One smoker burns an average of 2130 cigarettes per year in the Kingdom and spends 18 million Saudi Riyals everyday on their

smoking habit. Health care costs on smoking related diseases reach 50 million Saudi Riyals per year at King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh only.

When governments and organizations have attempted to control tobacco (for example, where it is used, or how it is advertised), the tobacco industry uses its enormous resources to derail or weaken laws and agreements.

Campaign against Anti-Smoking

A decline in smoking rates among immature teens provides hope that anti-smoking campaigns are effective in preventing them when they start to smoke (Wolburg, 2004). The positive relationship observed between exposure to state-sponsored anti-tobacco television advertising and increased rates of quitting among adult smokers to the growing body of evidence that supports the need for state governments to continue investing in antismoking advertising campaigns (Hyland, et. al.; 2006).

All campaigns are incomplete until these should have some specific goals. Every campaign needs a power, either in the shape of government motivational power or stressing people through some other specific strategies. Without power any campaign is useless, until you have the ability to motivate the individual against anything which is the primary aim. Without the use of power, one cannot reach ultimate goal. Power is needed from authentic sources and valuable authorities or team. It is noted from the previous studies that the effectiveness for any campaign without using power will not be that much effective until the use of power in a right place. For motivating the people's needs to be powerful, otherwise the campaign will not be that much effective. In KSA the higher authorities are doing its level best even they made this compulsory to make a note on each pack of cigarette Health Warning: Smoking is the main cause for lung cancer, lung diseases and for heart and arteries diseases etc. Health warnings should cover at least 30 percent of the surface of a pack of cigarettes and all materials used to make tobacco products should be listed on the packaging. The agreement also urges governments to strengthen indoor-smoking bans, place high taxes on tobacco products and act to stop the illegal trade of cigarettes (Rasooldeen & Ramkumar, 2010).

Furthermore, those interventions possess specific economic costs that may be a burden to the country which implements them. Interventions to be reviewed are school-based intervention, mass media/public education and enforcement of cigarette prohibition to minor. Anti-smoking campaigns has been used successfully in different educational institutes of the kingdom to make young people aware about the activities of tobacco industry and to encourage them to become anti-smoke advocates.

A latest research shows that there is an increasing trend among the people wishing to quit smoking on various grounds, especially with the availability of new successful treatment solutions eliminating nicotine addiction, giving hope for smokers to quit and enhance their confidence of getting rid of nicotine addiction and its severe withdrawal symptoms (Fakeeh, 2011).

It is a difficult to convincing teenagers to stop smoking. It's a tough issue for both parents and authorities at their educational institutions. Most of the teens that smoke doesn't show the habit while in educational institutions or at home; and a majority of them smoke in public places where there are no restrictions. Highlighting risks among adolescents who feel invincible may serve to increase the attractiveness of smoking as forbidden fruit, (Pecmann & Reibling, 2006).

According to the Saudi Ministry of Health survey, 62 percent of Saudis begin smoking between the ages of 10 and 20, 27 percent between the ages of 20 and 30, and 9 percent before the age of 10. According to a survey of smokers' attitudes toward smoking and smoking cessation conducted in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East and Africa, 77 percent of smokers believe that willpower is all a person

needs to quit successfully. The survey, conducted by IMS Health and sponsored by Pfizer, showed that the average smoker attempts to quit three to four times, primarily using willpower (Rasooldeen & Ramkumar, 2010).

According to Arab News (2012) the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are expected to double customs tariffs on cigarette and other tobacco imports. "The new duty will be known as the 'Health Tax,' taking into account the huge amount of money each GCC state spends on the treatment of tobacco-related diseases as well as for the rehabilitation of smokers.

Saudi Arabian Government spends billions on anti-smoking campaign with mixed results, In Medina city the University students travelling 70kms far for getting Tobacco (smoking), this is because that Government completely banned on smoking in Madinah city. It is the first city of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where the government banned sales of tobacco. This ban will be further extended to the city of Hail (Al-Saleh, 2009). In Makkah city also it is completely banned. The same example it is also completely banned to sell near the capital Adarriya'h Province. Government banned it completely in these areas and shortly it will cover some other cities also. There is a ban on smoking in the picnic spots like Wadi Laban and Wadi Hanifa, which are close to the capital city if Riyadh.

In Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Dr. Mazen Fakeeh, director general of Dr. Soliman Fakeeh Hospital, opened the first private clinic for people seeking help in kicking the nasty tobacco habit, and guide people on different ways to quitting. The new clinic at the hospital will give evidence-based treatment and counseling with regards to the smoking cessation. They have involved their health educators to give patients a basic knowledge about smoking cessation and positive aspect of abstinence from smoking. They have placed posters and show videos on hospital TV channels and publish in magazines and newspaper to increase the awareness among general public. Every year, they plan to organize a No Smoking Day on May 31st. Further, they have sent hospital wide emails to increase the awareness among staff regarding smoking cessation clinic and its working hours. Also, many other health care professionals have been involved who will refer their patients who wish to quit to the smoking cessation clinic for treatment (Fakeeh, 2011).

According to the World Health Organization, "Smoking is addiction requiring treatment and medical assistance. The cost of treating smoking associated diseases is fairly high and exhausts local resources and budgets allocated to health care, thus adding more economic burdens on health care institutions and the country in general.

According to the Saudi Ministry of Health, nearly \$2.5 billion is spent annually on curbing smoking-caused diseases. Saudi government launched anti-smoking campaign for the first time in 2003. The government interest towards this effectiveness of anti-smoking among the students, they are arranging some university level seminars which are against the anti-smoking and in which they shows how they will affect you socially and ethics wise.

In different educational institutions the social welfares by the cooperation of Government are working on different tasks to prevent new generation from such bad habits. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia they have several programs for anti-smoking in every corner of the Kingdom. No Smoking signs/ posters are placed at various key locations. Effective advertisements are advertisements that help the advertiser to reach its goals (Doyle & Saunders, 1990). In fact, each advertisement can be effective only when its explicit objectives should drive the planning, making, and completing. They specified some areas where the smokers will go and smoke there. A World Health Organization (2009) statement pointed out that "smoking kills nearly 21,000 persons in the Kingdom, out of 30,000 persons in the six GCC countries".

Possibility is everywhere until you experience it for yourself. The sense of having completed something that you have never done before brings about a change, a big change in your approach, boosts your self-belief and gets you that adrenalin rush in your system. You are now thinking that if this is possible, anything is possible. It's all in your mind. It doesn't matter what others tell you but what matters the most is what you tell yourself because at the end of the day it's your life, so live it by your regulations and beliefs. Try sometimes to convince yourself when you have some doubts something you cannot do- I CAN, I WILL (Vishal, 2009). Different teams of the government are working in different sectors to set up free medical camps to convince public and youths, and to aware people how to quit and at least reduce smoking.

Government completely banned the advertisement for cigarettes and tobacco in various media forms, newspapers, magazines and television. This resolution was passed by the government of Saudi Arabia. Government of Saudi Arabia is a signatory of the WHO's framework convention on Tobacco Control launched in May 2003. They have strictly banned any marketing efforts by tobacco companies. Government launched a six month long anti-smoking drive on May 2010. The ministry of health in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia planned out a comprehensive program during 2010. The Minister of health decided to stress the importance of effective enforcement of legislation related to banning smoking at school, colleges and University level. KSA Ministry of health implemented a new law, that is who caught on smoking in public places a heavy fine will be imposed and in case of violation, he will be punished and will be imprisoned. They also decided to stop all the tobacco dealing with other countries.

In this regard the world health organization awarded the executive board of health Minister Council for GCC States its award for tobacco control in 1999 in appraisal of its outstanding efforts for anti-smoking in the Gulf region. According to an article in BBC online (2009), there are many antismoking policies existing that have successfully reduced smoking. The very unique campaign was introduced first time in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. "Free wedding for quitting smoking", a very smart campaign was introduced for the smokers. Some people were criticized while some of them were praised. Hundreds of men have expressed interest in the anti-smoking drive, including a non-smoker who was ready to start the habit just so he could take part in it. Banners in Riyadh advertised the campaign slogan: "Kicking the habit is on you, and marriage is on us". Banners went up overpasses and bridges over the Saudi capital's major highways, depicting the campaign slogan in pink and reddish brown. Next to it were the faceless outlines of a bride, dressed in white and carrying a bouquet of flowers and of a man wearing a black, ceremonial cloak over his white thobe, the traditional robe which Saudi men wear. The quit-smoking-drive was also advertised in malls, at universities and in magazines.

Some citizens pointed out that supermarkets still sell cigarettes without giving due consideration to the age of buyers. According to them, the anti-smoking campaigns should also target supermarkets and restaurant owners who sell cigarettes and serve hookah pipes to youngsters. "I once asked a salesman why he was selling cigarettes to young boys when he knows they are bad for their health. The guy told me that he also sells Pepsi knowing that it's also bad for health and added that he is only concerned with making money" (Al-Mukhtar, 2010). About 70 percent of smoking causes deaths are expected in the Arab world as a result of direct or passive smoking that affects wives, children and friends of a smoker." (Ghafour, 2008).

Conclusion

The research has found a considerable number of studies with a potential to contribute to the existing knowledge of smoking practices in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). There is no complete study on the issues related to the prevalence of smoking among the residents of KSA and the anti-smoking measures taken by the government to control it. Yet, when all the studies are considered together, they provide good support for the notion that anti-smoking advertising can influence youth smoking.

In conclusion it can be said that smoking has risen at an alarming rate and this leads to an immense potential for health education strategies in the kingdom. Several measure has already been taken but there is no end to them till the time complete freedom from this practice is achieved.

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