

## Do Mass Media in Health Awareness Make a Palpable Impact on Cessation of Smokeless Tobacco Use?

This editorial is an invited commentary on an article published in the issue of the Indian Journal of Medical and Pediatric Oncology authored by Madewell *et al.*<sup>[1]</sup> that has pertinently addressed the relationship of mass media campaign with smokeless tobacco (SLT) cessation.

To quote the authors, India is the third largest producer of tobacco. There are over 300 million SLT users worldwide, of which 206 million (68.7%) live in India.<sup>[1,2]</sup> Being the second largest consumer of SLT,<sup>[1]</sup> we have one of the highest incidences of oral cavity cancers in the world arising every year.<sup>[3]</sup> Therefore, tobacco control measures are mandatory to halt this epidemic. Mass media warning is an effective tool to provide a health warning to the public,<sup>[4,5]</sup> but whether it translates effectively into cessation of SLT is yet to be answered.

As mentioned by Madewell *et al.*, to address the use and consequences of tobacco products, India initiated the National Tobacco Control Programme in 2007–2009 in 21 states, which was expanded to 29 states by 2013.<sup>[1]</sup> Literature shows that mass media campaigns effectively inform the public of the dangers of smoking tobacco and promote quitting while campaign awareness is associated with better knowledge and more negative attitudes toward SLT.<sup>[6]</sup> However, studies addressing the effect–cause relationship between antitobacco campaign and SLT cessation are lacking.

The Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) is a nationally representative household survey driven by the World Health Organization, which enables countries to collect data on adult tobacco use and key tobacco control measures. GATS 1 (2009–2010) monitored adult tobacco use, tracked tobacco control indicators, and assessed the impact of tobacco control efforts, including the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act of 2003, whereas GATS 2 (2016–2017) measured the impact of tobacco control legislation since GATS-1.<sup>[7]</sup> In this series of Indian Journal of Medical and Pediatric Oncology, recognized stalwarts of cancer research in India and global experts have addressed the association of mass media campaign and cessation of SLT users. This series provides an explicit appraisal of SLT cessation in India and is a valuable addition to the published work for cancer control in low- and middle-income countries.

This study has assessed the relations between SLT health warnings in mass media and intention and attempts to quit using SLT.<sup>[1]</sup> They also evaluated the changes between the two major surveys (GATS 1 and GATS 2). Approximately 1.6 lakh participants were screened with a response rate of more than 95% among both the parts. More participants noticed SLT warnings on SLT packages, television, billboards, and newspapers/magazines in GATS-2

than GATS-1, but fewer heard warnings on the radio ( $P < 0.01$ ) (71.8% vs. 82.1%). Thus, from these data, it was clear that Internet and television were more impactful as compared to radio on curbing the habit.

Along with media, health warning labels (HWLs) have a significant influence on tobacco habit cessation.<sup>[8]</sup> Evidence suggests that pictorial warning captures attention, increases the level of effectiveness, creates awareness of health risks, and creates unfavorable associations with the habit, as well as perceived effectiveness, negative affect, and motivation to quit.<sup>[9,10]</sup> It has been shown in the literature that the enhanced size of HWLs significantly increases the level of effectiveness. From GATS 1 to GATS 2, the size of HWLs has increased from 40% on single side to 85% on both sides of the packet. As the size of HWLs grew, this led to a significant impact on both intention and attempt to quit SLT. Antitobacco messages on television, billboards, public vehicles, and walls were also associated with greater SLT cessation behavior. This is modestly represented in this analysis comparing GATS 1 and GATS 2. Thus, this study which is nationally representing samples of Indian SLT users has enough evidence to show SLT warnings in mass media may promote SLT cessation behavior.<sup>[1]</sup>

Finally, we fully agree with the Madewell *et al.* that health warnings in mass media would definitely play an important role in the overall strategy to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with SLT use.<sup>[1]</sup>

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