ITC BANGLADESH SURVEY: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This summary presents key findings from Wave 1 of the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Bangladesh Survey—a face-to-face cohort survey of a national sample of 2,510 adult smokers and 2,116 adult non-smokers selected from 80 villages/wards in Bangladesh, including the tribal populations of Garo and Chakma. An additional floating sample of 597 adult smokers and 540 adult non-smokers was selected from six urban slums in and around Dhaka city. Bangladesh was the first country to sign the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on June 16, 2003, and was among the first 40 countries to become a Party to the FCTC. Bangladesh made a further commitment to tobacco control in 2005 with the passage of the Tobacco Control Act (TCA), whose provisions, including enhanced warning labels, smoke-free legislation, and advertising and promotion restrictions were implemented in 2006. This summary of the ITC Bangladesh Wave 1 findings represents an assessment of the impact of the TCA on tobacco use and on key indicators related to tobacco use and identifies areas where action needs to be taken to move forward in reducing tobacco use in Bangladesh in the future. Wave 2 of the ITC Bangladesh Survey began in March 2010. The data and documentation of these surveys are available at www.itcproject.org.

ITC Bangladesh Survey
Survey Mode: Face-to-face survey
Wave 1 Survey Sample: 94,485 adults from 31,689 households were enumerated to estimate the prevalence of tobacco use. 3,107 adult (age 15+) smokers (including cigarettes, bidis, and hookah) and 2,656 adult (age 15+) non-smokers (including smokeless tobacco users) were surveyed.
Wave 1 Survey Dates: February to May 2009
Project Partners: Bureau of Economic Research, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
Objectives: (1) To determine the overall prevalence rate of tobacco use (including cigarettes, bidis, and smokeless tobacco) and the factors that are related to tobacco use throughout the country; (2) to measure the impact of tobacco control policies of the Tobacco Control Act; and (3) to compare tobacco use and the factors related to tobacco use with the findings of the WHO study conducted in 2004-05.

What is the ITC Project?
The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (the ITC Project) is the first-ever international cohort study of tobacco use, being conducted in 20 countries. It is designed to evaluate the impact of policies implemented under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Each ITC Survey follows standardized protocols and includes rigorous measures to assess the impact and identify the determinants of effective tobacco control policies in the following areas:

- Health warning labels and package descriptors
- Smoke-free legislation
- Pricing and taxation of tobacco products
- Education and support for cessation
- Tobacco advertising and promotion

ITC Survey findings will provide an evidence base to guide policies enacted under the FCTC, and to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of these legislative efforts.

Today, 2.5 million more Bangladesh people are smoking than 5 years ago
The ITC Bangladesh Survey shows that overall smoking (cigarettes, bidis, and hookah) prevalence has actually increased in the past five years (since the WHO study of 2004-05) from 20.9% to 22.0%. Our findings show that 42.0% of males and 1.3% of females smoke some form of tobacco. These prevalence figures reveal that, compared to 2004-05, there are now 2.5 million more smokers in Bangladesh. The growth in smokeless tobacco use among men and women since 2004-05 is also striking – from 14.8% to 27.6% among men and from 24.4% to 32.0% among women in 2009. Overall, the percentage of Bangladeshi people who use smoked tobacco, smokeless tobacco or both, increased from 36.8% in 2004-05 to 43.2% in 2009.

Based on epidemiological studies of smoking-related death rates, it is estimated that between 14% and 21% of all men alive today in Bangladesh will die prematurely because of smoking. The average loss of life expectancy of those that die is estimated to be about 6 to 10 years.

High rates of tobacco use in tribal and the slum areas threaten lives of people in these areas
Among the Garo and Chakma populations in Netrokona and Rangamati districts, respectively, 49.6% of males and 16.8% of females were smokers. A significant percentage smoke both cigarette and bidis (21.5% among men and 3.9% among women). The prevalence of hookah smoking is predominantly found in the tribal population (13.0% among men and 7.4% among women). The smoking prevalence in the slum areas is even more troubling. 78.8% of the male population in six urban slum areas in and around Dhaka city were smokers and 68.1% (that is 86% of smokers) were cigarette smokers.

Bangladeshi smokers are nearly unanimous in their negative attitudes toward tobacco use AND in their support for stronger Government measures against tobacco
Bangladeshi smokers have extremely negative opinions about tobacco. 95% have a ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ overall opinion about smoking cigarettes – the greatest proportion of smokers with negative opinions of all ITC countries.

Bangladeshi tobacco users support the government in implementing strong tobacco control policies. 98% of tobacco smokers themselves support the idea that the government should do more to tackle the harms of smoking. This is the highest level of support among all ITC countries.


Despite their negative opinions about tobacco, few Bangladeshi smokers have plans to quit.

Intentions to quit among Bangladeshi smokers are very low among ITC countries – only about one-third (36%) of bidi smokers and only half (51%) of cigarette and “dual” smokers (those who smoke both cigarettes and bidis) have any plans to quit. Only 5% of bidi smokers and 10% of cigarette and dual smokers have plans to quit within the next 6 months.

Cigarettes are much more affordable today than in the past

Cigarettes have become more affordable in recent years. In 1990, 100 packs of Star brand cigarettes cost an amount equal to 16.8% of average annual per capita income. But in 2006, the same 100 packs cost only 6.6% of average annual per capita income. In other words, cigarettes have become over 2.5 times more affordable. The considerably lower tax rate on bidis impedes government efforts to reduce smoking rates as cigarette smokers can simply substitute the more expensive forms of smoked tobacco with cheaper forms.

Smokers want more health information on cigarette packs

The TCA mandated text warnings on 30% of the front and back of all tobacco packages are a good start in using the cigarette pack itself to educate the Bangladeshi people on the many harms of tobacco use. However, one-third (30%) of smokers do not notice the current warnings and only 16% of smokers believe that the warnings make them more likely to quit.

62% of Bangladeshi smokers want more health information on cigarette packs – the highest level of support among all ITC countries.

Smoke-free laws have not been effective but support is high

Adherence and enforcement of the smoke-free law of the TCA is weak. 93% of Bangladeshi smokers and 78% non-smokers noticed people smoking in restaurants/tea stalls, and 49% smokers and 46% non-smokers noticed people smoking in public transportation. Yet support for complete smoking bans among smokers themselves is very strong—with 68% supporting bans in restaurants/tea stalls and 99% on public transportation.

Implications for Tobacco Control

The ITC Bangladesh Survey provides powerful evidence of the high and increasing level of tobacco use and the readiness of Bangladeshi tobacco users for stronger tobacco control policy interventions. A number of governmental actions are recommended to strengthen and extend its tobacco control efforts:

• Increase price and taxation across all forms of tobacco

There is an urgent need to increase tobacco-specific taxes and harmonize tax rates across different forms of tobacco (e.g. cigarettes and bidis) so that tobacco users do not simply substitute their higher cost cigarettes for lower cost bidis.

• Create and implement larger health warnings with graphic images

It is time for Bangladesh to meet the obligations of the recent strong FCTC Article 11 Guidelines on warning labels by introducing rotating, larger warnings (at least 50% of the top of the package on both front and back) including graphic images of the harms of tobacco use. This will help to motivate quitting and increase the effectiveness of the warnings among low-literate and non-literate Bangladeshi people.

• Reaffirm and strengthen enforcement of the smoke-free law of the TCA

ITC evaluation of smoke-free policies throughout the world have demonstrated that strong implementation and enforcement of smoke-free laws can be highly effective in reducing the public’s exposure to secondhand smoke. There is an urgent need to create comprehensive smoke-free (100%) public places with no exemptions and no provisions for ventilation, which has been demonstrated to be ultimately ineffective.

The effectiveness of taxation

The WHO has concluded that increasing the price of tobacco through higher taxes is the single most effective way to decrease consumption and encourage tobacco users to quit.3, 4

Raising tobacco taxes is even more urgently needed in Bangladesh because of its recent significant increase in economic development, which has made cigarettes much more affordable. Tobacco taxes must keep pace in order to reduce the affordability of cigarettes and bidis.

The power and importance of media

Findings from ITC Surveys across many countries show that media campaigns designed to educate the public on the harms of tobacco use can also enhance the effectiveness of tobacco control policies, for example, for smoke-free laws and warning labels.5

THE ITC INTERNATIONAL TEAM

The ITC International Research team includes over 80 tobacco control researchers in 20 countries worldwide. Its Principal Investigators are:

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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The ITC Project continues to explore opportunities for collaborating with low and middle income countries to help policy makers design, implement, and evaluate FCTC policies.

THE ITC PROJECT: EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF FCTC POLICIES IN...

20 countries • 50% of the world’s population • 60% of the world’s smokers • 70% of the world’s tobacco users

Canada
China (Mainland)
France
Germany
India
Ireland
Malaysia
Mauritius
Mexico
Netherlands
New Zealand
South Korea
Thailand
United Kingdom
Uruguay
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