

Impact of pictorial warnings on tobacco packs in India

Ramesh Nagarajappa¹, Debasruti Naik², Gayathri Ramesh³

¹Professor and Head, ²Senior Lecturer, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Institute of Dental Sciences, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, ³Associate Professor, Department of Dentistry, Chamarajanagar Institute of Medical Sciences, Chamarajanagar, Karnataka, India

Abstract

Tobacco use is represented as the most important public health predicament as well as the number one reason of preventable death worldwide. India ranks the largest tobacco producer as well as the second biggest exporter of tobacco commodities globally. Numerous people each year are killed because of tobacco consumption as it affects every organ and system of the body. Hence policies need to be directed towards tobacco control globally. This review article highlights the impact of one such policy - pictorial messages on tobacco warnings.

Keywords: Global, Pictorial, Smoking, Warning.

Introduction

Tobacco use is still considered as preventable death worldwide.¹ More or less, 6 million people are dying every year because of this tobacco-related causes with a predictable increase in mortality rates getting 8 million cases by the year 2030.² Consumption of tobacco is usually in the form of smoking³ and is associated with many respiratory diseases, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer.² According to the World Health Organization (WHO) testimony on the Global Tobacco epidemic 2013, around 500 billion dollars of monetary harm annually results because of tobacco use.^{4,5}

Worldwide, several policies have been introduced to address the economic and health burden of tobacco use. The first international treaty on tobacco - WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO

FCTC) was held in 2003 where Saudi Arabia was among the 168 states who signed the treaty. In its eleventh article the action of binding and labelling of tobacco commodities started and the FCTC recommends a revolving series of health messages that warns and cover at least 50% (or must cover at least 30%) on average of the front and back of the package. It also proposes the use of graphical health messages instead of textual ones.^{5,6} The FCTC policy proved to be one of the very effective policies as act as direct means of communicating the risks associated with smoking.⁷ Therefore, the chances of smokers noticing the labels increases up to 50% if the health warning text and image is placed on the front side of the packages.⁶

Also, in November 2008, Article 11 guidelines were adopted at the 3rd conference of the parties which focused on the inclusion of tobacco package health warnings. After this, almost 28 countries globally have started introducing pictorial warnings.²

Health communication intervention: This health warning pictorial messages have proved to be the most valuable way for enlightening smokers as well as non smokers regarding their health risk. In most of the countries, smokers alleged that they get to know the risk associated with cigarette from warning messages rather than erstwhile resource except television.⁸ In 1950s, it was also established that "fear appeals" were very

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Debasruti Naik

Senior Lecturer, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Institute of Dental Sciences, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

e-mail: smilewithdebsruti@gmail.com

constructive in changing health behaviour (e.g. quitting), especially if they are combined with any knowledge.⁴

Efficacy of pictorial warnings: Facts for better latent effect of pictographic messages have initiated from target groups, questionnaire studies and new coverage research.³ An investigation of records of the ITC Four Country Survey compares effect of prefacing image-based messages in Australia in 2005 by introduction of lengthy text messages in the United Kingdom in 2003. Pictographic messages are also referred by ex-smokers as an imperative reason in their endeavour to end as well as they should be allied in the utilization of qualitative cessation services like toll-free phone “helpline”.⁹

Low literate population: Pictographic warning structures may be predominantly significant in transferring health data to those populations with lower education rates.^{1,2} Smokers are reported to be less educated than others. Introductory information suggests that countries having pictorial warning messages exhibit less disparity in health acquaintance throughout all the educational levels.¹⁰ Meticulous care has to assort pictures for using it in uneducated populations like without inserting text messages and putting smoking pictographs could involuntarily imply only approval rather than forewarning of its troubles whereas images might say a 1000 words but it is always difficult to choose from those to utter the thousand correct words.⁴

Lower middle class countries: Data from lower middle class income also ropes the usefulness of bigger pictographical warnings in excess of texting warnings, and also suggests that pictorial messages can be good because of the awareness of health risks of smoking.¹¹

Are Current Tobacco Pictorial Warnings in India Effective?: Around 800,000 deaths every year in India is because of this tobacco and out of which 700,000 are correlated to smoking.¹² About 10 million deaths per year are likely to occur globally by 2030. Tobacco use in India is highly complex since consumption rate is much higher in various ways in different parts of the country. Behavioural changes like quitting and reducing the tobacco consumption can be well communicated very effectively by warning labels on tobacco.¹

India ranks the largest tobacco producer as well as second largest exporter of tobacco products globally.³ Several people every year are killed because of tobacco consumption as it affects various organs of their body. The load of ailment is because of tobacco smoking

which has records for 4 lakh patients of oral cancers and 1.3 million patients of coronary artery disease as well as 7 million patients of chronic pulmonary disease. About 1000 young children now smoke and out of them 500 may die of tobacco induced diseases where 250 of them are in their middle age and the rest of them in their old age approximately.^{9,11}

Awareness about tobacco commodities is mandated under The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (COTPA) in the year 2003 in India. [13] Currently, tobacco products are now displaying an image of scorpion on smokeless form of tobacco along with an image of diseased lungs or an image of X-ray of lungs showing cancer due to smoked form of tobacco.¹³

Tobacco Labelling at India: In the year 2006 the health warnings policy of India was drafted. A proposed final set of health warnings after 2 complete rounds of revisions in 2006 and 2007, got released in 2008 and were enforced on each manufactured cigarette packages from 31st May in 2009. Cigarette packages have 2 variety of warnings and on all smokeless tobacco products a totally separate warning was rotated.¹⁴

The Health and Family Welfare Ministry Department in India in 2011 approved an amendment to the regulations that consists of 4 new variety of image based warnings which should be applied on tobacco and bidi packages as well as 4 new variety of image based warnings for smokeless junks. Tobacco companies were allowed to decide any one photo out of each set of 4 images for smoked and smokeless tobacco products and the rules were implemented on December 1, 2011.¹⁵

India anticipated a new round of picture warnings on September 27, 2012 and those produced warnings as of April 1, 2013, although execution of these pictures varied. Again, a group of 3 new pictographic messages were made for smoked tobacco products, and as usual a separate group of 3 new variety of message were made for smokeless tobacco products. Health warnings structures had to cover 40% of the frontage of all cigarette packages.¹⁶ After all the above proposals, the government again proposed awareness messages on October 15, 2014 that covers 85% of the front and back of the pack and the deadline was extended awaiting 1st April in 2016.¹⁷

Pictorial warnings on tobacco products: To make them able to visualise and understand the character of tobacco-related diseases pictorial warnings and images

were made for the users. Awareness were created to inform the serious illness that can be caused due to tobacco usage. Therefore, the messages had to be very effective and should be able to keep away the user.

Because of its multilingual and multicultural communities in a country like India, a warning messages can break all the regional, cultural and language barriers. Likewise, where a maximum percentage of the people are uneducated, and therefore written messaged warnings can be ignored whereas graphic awareness messages can help in understanding. This kind of policy is an effective public health strategy that will overhead the government as well as the people at no cost because the tobacco companies will carry out all the expenses meant for the colourful messages.¹⁸

Several countries along with India are now assigned as a signatory to WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control at the 56th World Health Assembly in the year 2003 and is expected to pursue the WHO guidelines. Pictographic warnings usage on tobacco commodities which is the WHO's initiative called as six "M POWER" rules were developed and intended to battle tobacco among the countries in 2008.^{7,11,12}

M Power rules are as follows:

1. Monitoring tobacco use as well as controlling of activities.
2. Protecting individuals from the hazardous effect of tobacco.
3. Offering help or lend a hand to people who have it in mind to refrain from using tobacco.
4. Warning everybody to know the ill-effects of tobacco.
5. Enforcing rules in opposition to all tobacco linked activities that also includes sponsorships.
6. Raising the worth of tobacco materials to reduce its consumption.¹⁹

Various western countries like Australia, Singapore, Brazil, Chile, Thailand, Hong Kong, Canada and Chile were successfully working on pictographic messages and images on tobacco merchandise packets. The result of this strategy has come to be very much effective on people with low education and low economic status.⁷

It was realised that only constitutional warnings enforced on all tobacco products in 2005 under COTPA

was not sufficient to lead in reduction of the use of tobacco. Therefore, the authentic enforcement of these rules has been postponed repeatedly, apparently because of demands exerted by the tobacco manufacturing companies.⁷

Activities related to enforcement of tobacco pictorial warnings^{20,21}:

- July 2006: The government issued an announcement of the definite pictures which could be used by tobacco companies within seven months. They demand for grounding time and therefore the government had to extend time period up to June 2007.
- February-May 2007: The objective of company was to utilize any image of a body which should indicate that smoking tobacco can kill. A Group of Ministers (GoM) was created to make a decision who asked for a further extension till July.
- August 2007: Meanwhile, the parliament amended the bill in support of building the application of the skull and crossbones picture optional and should not be compulsory. The court only marks a deadline of December 1 in the year of 2007 for picture-based messages to be enforced in the public.
- September 2007: The GoM made the withdrawal of the images like skull, crossbones, corpse, citing cultural and religious reasons.
- December 2007: The government now ordered for another extension till 17th of March 2008.
- March 10, 2008: The government of health issues few courses of action as date of enforcement shifted to 24th of June 2008.¹⁹ Messages like "smoking kills" and "tobacco kills" were to be printed on cigarette, beedi and other smokeless tobacco products in English and regional languages.²⁰

The fundamental right is to preserve a healthy life and it has to be enabled by the government. Therefore, strong warning messages is required to create awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco to the consumer. Tobacco is the only kind of lethal item for consumption having no safe limit and it is legally marketed to consumers globally.

India's Ranking on pictorial warnings: Around the globe, India stands fifth, jointly with Hong Kong and Thailand sharing with 85 % of the tobacco packets covered as per the Canadian Cancer Society report

and only 58 % of the world's population follow this regulation.²² In India according to the current regulation of pictorial warnings and in the lead the direction of the High Court as well as the Supreme Court, and the chief executive of Voluntary Health Association of India, said that "India has constantly demonstrating leadership by enforcing the relinquish-line figure on all tobacco packets and everyone have pleaded the government for this."¹¹

Conclusions

Graphic image based warnings can considerably enhance the efficacy of warning instructions. The application of lifelike images is a significant way out of replacing those positive relations with that of unenthusiastic associations, which is very much suitable in giving the shattering effect of global health by using tobacco related products. Future investigational research should inspect the impact of pictorial warnings on smoking activities. Such work should build up the worldwide evidence base for pictographic messages in future and should also develop our skill to appreciate the 'active ingredients' that reveal such type of messages as well as making them aware of other various effective tobacco control policies.

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