

Up, up and away

The Voice
of the People

Public Opinion in Pakistan, 2007-2008

THE impact of regular tobacco smoking has been recognised as harmful to the health of smokers as well as those breathing in the same atmosphere. Anti-smoking campaigns throughout the world have been successful in educating the general public about the possible links between tobacco and cancer. Surveys accessing popular views about smoking have been conducted by Gallup Pakistan since 1985 and results provide revealing trends in public perceptions.

At the close of 2007, around 50 per cent of Pakistani men claimed to use tobacco in one or another form: cigarettes, hookah (tobacco pipe), *naswar* (a local sniff) or paan (a special leaf with blended tobacco and other ingredients). Some of the respondents use more than one form of tobacco.

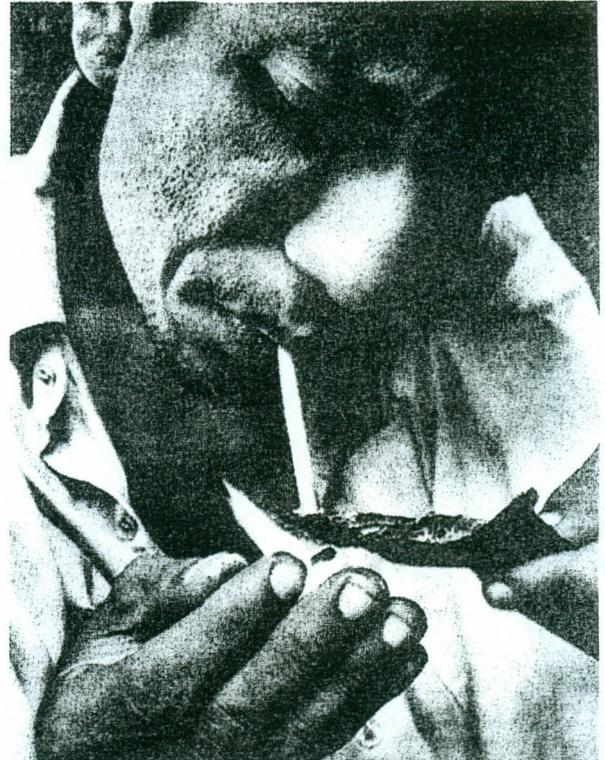
The majority of smokers, around 51 per cent, consume less than a packet a day, followed by 35 per cent who smoke one pack, and 14 per cent who use more than one pack of cigarettes daily. Keeping in mind this high consumption level, three-fourths (75 per cent) are convinced that they are highly addicted to smoking tobacco.

More than half of all smokers (53 per cent) said they started smoking after the age of 18. Close to one-third (32 per cent) admitted having started smoking between 16 to 18 years of age, and 15 per cent claimed to have begun before the age of 16.

The recurrent reason for taking up smoking was curiosity. The majority (74 per cent) claimed to have started smoking for the sake of interest. A significant number of about 24 per cent developed the habit under peer pressure.

Interestingly, a large number (73 per cent) of smokers said that they want to quit smoking yet only 69 per cent have ever tried. Those who never tried quitting maintain that it is a firm habit now (32 per cent). For 17 per cent of smokers, the reason for not quitting is that the habit is a source of comfort. For another 17 per cent it helps in the digestion of food. A large number (31 per cent) could not give any reason for not trying to quit the habit.

Studies suggest that around 50 per cent of Pakistani men claimed to use tobacco in one form or another



Sixty-one per cent of people believe that smokers as well as cigarette manufacturing companies are equally responsible for the adverse effects of smoking on health, whereas 25 per cent think that manufacturing companies are responsible and 13 per cent hold smokers to be the main culprits.

Responding to national and international pressures, governments across the world have put various kinds of restriction on the advertising and sale of cigarettes. The majority of Pakistanis (80 per cent) support heavy taxes on cigarettes, 79 per cent think that there should be a ban on cigarette ads on TV and radio, while 68 per cent advocate a complete ban on the sale of cigarettes.

In Pakistan it is mandatory for cigarette companies to warn the user of its bad effects. However, these words of caution do not always get across. When asked if they knew of the warnings that follow cigarette advertisements, 95 per cent of respondents only knew the statement, 'smoking is injurious to health: Ministry of Health.'

However, only 27 per cent of people knew the statement, 'underage sale of cigarettes is prohibited.' An even smaller number (21 per cent) knew of the statement, 'smoking causes cancer and heart diseases'.

Nonetheless, it appears that despite not recognising the cautionary statements in cigarette advertisements, two-thirds (75 per cent) of

people agree with the statement that cigarette smoking causes cancer and heart disease, while 13 per cent partially agree with this statement. Only 11 per cent negate it altogether.

Scientific studies reveal that passive smoking is as harmful as actively smoking a cigarette. A majority of the population supports a ban on smoking in public places.

Eighty-seven per cent say that it should be banned in offices, 87 per cent support a ban on public transport, 80 per cent support a ban at bus stops, 65 per cent support a ban on smoking in hotels and restaurants and 57 per cent say that it should be strictly prohibited in recreational parks. ■

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