

Review Article

A short review on Gutkha chewing: A Public Health Issue in Gujarat

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Abstract: Though the adverse effects of gutkha results in compromised oral as well as general health of the individual, it is still being chewed in all states of India, including Gujarat. There is need to increase the awareness in the public regarding the various adverse effects of gutkha.

Keywords: Areca nut, Gutkha, Gutkha chewing

DISCUSSION

Gutkha is a dry sweetened mixture of crushed areca nut, tobacco, catechu, lime, aromas and flavorings as well as other additives. It may contain herbal products like pudina, saffron and dried blood from slaughter house. This mixture is later on boiled with lizard tail which gives the consumer a peculiar kick. It is powdery, granular light brownish to white substance. It is taken typically after meals as a mouth freshener. The Gutkha begins to dissolve within moments and becomes deep red in color. Later it imparts a intense feeling than that of tobacco [1, 2].

Gutkha is sold as loose or in small pouches. The market of Gutkha in India is about worth of INR150bn-INR200bn. Several brands sachets are sold usually through paan shops thus become easily accessible to everyone. Some smart sachet packaging does not mention tobacco as an ingredient, some are chocolate-flavored and some are marketed as breath fresheners [3].

Numerous brands of paan-masalas and gutkhas are being advertised and sold in Indian markets without impunity in the name of flavor, fragrance and freshness [4]. Thus, gutkha use can begin at a very young age. Due to its flavored taste, easy availability and cheapness, it is popular among poor children who often exhibit precancerous lesions or conditions such as oral

submucous fibrosis and leukoplakia at an early age [1, 3].

The use of tobacco with lime, betel quid with tobacco, betel quid without tobacco and areca nut have been classified as carcinogenic to humans. Increase in oral cancer among the young due to increased consumption of the alternative chewing products gutkha and pan masala [5, 6].

Smokeless tobacco products such as gutkha and khaini were found to have 3095 chemical ingredients, of which 28 were proven carcinogens. Based on the suggestion of a national consultation report, a new rule was notified under the Central government's Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA). According to rule 2.3.4 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011, tobacco and nicotine cannot be used as ingredients in any food products [3].

Gutkha is banned under the provision to ban any food product containing harmful adulterants in the centrally enacted Food Safety and Regulation (Prohibition) Act 2011. The Act allows these products to be banned for a year and it can be extended every year before it lapses, resulting in a pseudo permanent ban. In all states except Maharashtra, the public health ministry enforces the ban. In Maharashtra, the Food and Drug Administration and the police enforce the ban.

Fourteen states in India have banned gutkha using regulation that prohibits sale of food products containing tobacco [3].

In 2012, four new gutkha product replacements were introduced in the study community, consisting of scented supari mix with flavor and scent similar to gutkha along with packets of loose tobacco, which together cost approximately Rs 2-3 per pair. Distributors were instructing shop owners to tell customers to mix the packets to obtain a product similar to gutkha [3].

The ban may be contributing to increased promotional activities and profits of sale of other tobacco products of smokeless and smoked type. Whether the ban has a long term effect on cancer prevention and reduction of risk remains to be seen [7].

The Gujarat Scenario

According to “The Global Adult Tobacco Survey of India (2009-10)”; in Gujarat the use of smokeless tobacco use is more prevalent with addiction in 18.4 per cent of the adult population [8]. The Gujarat government has banned gutkha sale on 11th September 2012, but one can sale separately tobacco, beetle nut and lime separately [8]. Thus one can consume the tobacco preparation without breaking the law.

The need of the hour is to ban arecanut & tobacco too, as Maharashtra Govt has banned. In India, Areca nut is very much linked to the religious practice and chewing arecanut has been socially accepted in Indian culture. Gujarat is one of the state that consumes largest arecanut as compared to other state. Arecanut plays an important role in causation of precancerous lesions such as leukoplakia, oral submucous fibrosis. It is well known fact that these pre-cancerous lesions may convert into cancer in few years. Moreover Gujarat is one of the states in India that produces chewing form of tobacco, it will be difficult for the Government to stop

this cultivation, because government has to think of farmers too. This can be done through motivating and assisting the farmers to cultivate some other crop.

CONCLUSION

The Government should think of banning tobacco, areca nut with strict regulation and also regulate policies for the farmers by subsidizing and assisting them to grow crops other than areca nut to avoid the distress. Immediate ban on areca nut won't work. Planned policy which should be implemented with strictly monitoring is needed.

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