

## **Links between nicotine and *Areca* addictions**

Our data suggest that the betel addiction is indeed linked to nicotine addiction. This suggests that something like nicotine gum could be useful for your husband, especially if he is already mixing tobacco with his quid (at least 50% of betel users do this).

> Roger L. Papke

Gutka by definition is - two third areca nut and one third chewing tobacco. Therefore it carries 2 carcinogens.

SMF component of oral cancer or SMF in isolation emanates from Areca Nut component of Gutka.

Many South Indian and Gujarati community chew raw Areca Nut as digestive after meals. This may be with or without habit of Gutka use.

Sale of Gutka in India is illegal. However, many Indian brands are being sold in USA.

Almost all Gutka users, thanks to pack warning, are already aware of its harmful effects.

Being addicted to two psychoactive substance, they find it impossible to quit despite their knowledge and desire

Intense Cessation therapy can make only 10% quit over a period of 6 months. Most others relapse.

Therefore, it is time to think beyond current users as a cost effective and sustainable strategy.

Let's prevent emergence of new users and make efforts to curb initiation of SLT / AN use in certain ethnic communities. With above in mind, I can think of only one thing - Stop easy access of these products by working with regulators and law enforcers.

Towards that, if we want to take this discussion to logical end, we need to take this discussion beyond medical community and out of our comfort zone. That is how we succeeded in India.

Please find some time to read this article - <http://blogs.bmj.com/tc/2015/08/27/can-prohibition-work-the-case-of-indias-smokeless-tobacco-ban/>

> Pankaj Chaturvedi

We have a mouth cancer survivor who also owned Gutka Factory when he got cancer. He shut down his factory following his treatment under my care. He is currently a whistle blower and deeply involved in anti tobacco movement in India under the banner of Voice of Tobacco Victims.

You can know about him -

<http://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/other/How-a-Gutkha-maker-ended-up-with-cancer-after-chewing-chemicals-used-to-flavour-tobacco/articleshow/45527790.cms>

<http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report-living-to-tell-the-tale-vijay-tiwari-2044252>

[http://www.afternoondc.in/city-news/what-goes-around-comes-around/article\\_126888](http://www.afternoondc.in/city-news/what-goes-around-comes-around/article_126888)

[http://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/can-ittar-town-survive-with-french-help-115060600797\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/can-ittar-town-survive-with-french-help-115060600797_1.html)

<http://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/metro/mumbai/other-news/gutkha-maker-ended-up-with-cancer/articleshow/45530500.cms>

<https://khabar.ndtv.com/news/india/how-a-gutkha-maker-ended-up-with-cancer-after-chewing-chemicals-used-to-flavour-tobacco-767014>

Mr Tiwari is travelling to Chicago on a personal trip next month. I see an opportunity that US media can be exposed to Mr Tiwari. He will explain about the adulterants and toxic chemical are used for processing. This will create a sensation among regulators in USA and wake them up from slumber. This will also inform the users that what they are chewing is infact a POISON.

I have already spoken to him and he is ready for this. Let me know if anyone is interested in taking it up.

> Pankaj Chaturvedi

This is very interesting and timely. How can we be involved? I would very much like to get my lab involved (funding permitting) with sorting out the toxic and mutagenic factors in areca, but of course the processing of gutka adds a couple more layers of complexity (including all aspects of the tobacco itself). When I opened up a package ion Gutka that Parul gave me I expected it to look like Pan Masala with some identifiable tobacco. I was shocked to see that it was amorphous lumpy gray powder. It must indeed go though serious processing.

>Roger Papke

This past weekend, a campaign we have been working on for several years governing tobacco taxes in India reached a critical point. I thought you would find this of interest.

On Saturday, in India we had one of the most important tax advocacy successes we have had anywhere after what we can only describe as one of the most intense, comprehensive, long lasting and most sophisticated advocacy campaigns our team has ever conducted. Thisd was a victory that would not have happened but for the Bloomberg Initiative. It was an achievement against great odds that will impact the price that all 275 million tobacco users will pay for their tobacco products and for the first time in history will treat the product smoked by more Indians than any other product – bidis – as the serious health threat that it actually is. Over the years we have made progress in increasing taxes on cigarettes, but bidis by and large remained untaxed as the “poor man’s pleasure”.

Some background and details:

For the last several years India has been in the process of completely revising how it taxes all goods and services with the goal of developing a uniform Goods and Services Tax that will apply country wide, replace all local taxes and all existing taxes on goods. The goal is to have as few categories as possible to create uniformity, minimize confusion and reduce tax avoidance.

For tobacco this has been both a potential opportunity and a potential disaster. The new GST tax will replace all taxes on tobacco products in India, including the many state level tobacco taxes,

for which we have worked for the last six plus years. Because India is replacing the tax on ALL goods and services, it has brought out intensive lobbying by virtually every industry, including all components of the tobacco industry - the major cigarette companies, the owners of the bidi companies, smokeless tobacco manufacturers. They have sought to galvanize tobacco growers and bidi workers across the country.

The risk was that all of the big money lobbying would roll back the progress we had made on cigarettes at the central level and bidis in a number of states and continue to keep bidis taxed at a dramatically lower level than cigarettes. Our hope was that we could use the tax revision to undue the many loopholes that had developed over the years under industry pressure and to make the case to finance officials and the public that bidis should be taxed as the dangerous products they are. For much of the campaign, we were told that there was no way that the government would withstand the pressure to keep the tax on bidis low, that the bidi “barons’ were too powerful, that too many states depend on bidis and that too many poor people would lose their livelihood if bidis were taxed higher. At the same time the cigarette industry was lobbying with everything they had.

To resolve the many disputes that arose during the process about what the different tax rates should be and what products should fall into which categories the government set up a committee chaired by the central Finance Minister and made up of the Finance Ministers from each of the 29 states. Over the course of more than a year the committee met a total of 15 times, often for multiple days and on Saturday made the final decisions on the last two most controversial products – gold and bidis.

To make a long story short, given the process we succeeded in ways no one thought possible.

The Result:

The highest tax bracket for a small number of “demerit” goods was set at 28% and to the shock of almost everyone – all three tobacco product categories, including bidis were included.

We were confident cigarettes would be at the “demerit” goods category, but both smokeless and bidis were question marks. The bidi industry asked that they not be taxed or be taxed as the essential goods rate of 5%. Our allies told us to be realistic and that the best we could hope for is for bidis to be categorized at the 12 to 18% rate.

Both cigarettes and smokeless tobacco will also have an additional tax (called a cess) added to their 28% rate that will also impact the final prices of these products. These two products were among a minuscule number that had a cess added on to the 28% rate.

Why is this so important:

The Indian market of smoking tobacco is dominated by bidis which consists of shredded tobacco, hand rolled in a tendu leaf. Bidis are usually smoked by men, but produced mainly by women and young children who roll them in their homes. Bidis outsell cigarettes by a ratio of eight to one (8:1) in India. About 2/3 of all adult smokers in India use bidis.

In addition, smokeless tobacco use in India is far more prevalent than smoking. Smokeless tobacco use kills 200,000 people in India each year, accounting for 74% of the global burden of smokeless tobacco – making India the oral cancer capitol of the world. Close to 80% of all women in India who use tobacco use smokeless tobacco and it is not unusual for rural Indian mothers to give their young children smokeless tobacco.

#### Our Campaign:

At the Campaign we have worked on this issue in various ways for more than 4 years, but with exceptional intensity for the last 2 to 3 years. The campaign involved a comprehensive approach involving research, communications, coalition building, bringing in new, non-traditional partners and direct advocacy. We and our Bloomberg partners produced a solid set of materials about the health effects of each of these products, their toll and cost in India and projections of different levels of taxation. We produced multiple models of the different impact of the different tax proposals that were being discussed over time. The technical work was absolutely essential (we had been briefing Ministry of Finance people on various options for a long time and WHO's technical team made a visit to the Ministry of Finance earlier this year) but critically this is a victory that required a massive effort to create, and demonstrate the political will necessary to give the officials who wanted to do the right thing the space and opportunity to do it.

Our India team with key Indian grantees developed a close, trusting relationship with many individuals in the Ministry of Finance at multiple levels, including both the technical levels and the political levels at the highest levels. We consistently made the case that the proposals we supported would be solid revenue generators and also laid out the data showing the lives higher taxes would save. Critically, we also made the case that there was strong public support for what we proposed. It is hard to overstate the importance of the closeness and trust built up between our team and critical decision makers and the frequency with which they were in contact.

Our team and multiple grantees took the case to many of the state capitals and organized meetings of local tobacco control, public health and other groups with state finance officials to make the case – done on multiple occasions before major meetings and to reinforce the messages. Our communications team working closely with VHAI and other grantees also worked continually to generate news coverage and media interest – both nationally and in the key states. Vital Strategies, a Bloomberg Initiative partner, did an excellent job in support of the effort with paid media on the problems of bidis and tobacco use. In many respects, the tax campaign around bidis focused national attention on the issue more than any public education campaign had ever done.

And, we developed relationships with organizations and individuals who represented bidi workers that both communicated that they were being exploited by the bidi owners, wanted to find alternative livelihoods and supported taxes that would discourage use. This support – expressed in letters to key decision makers at the most crucial time and in outreach to the media as the decisions on bidis were about to be debated – were incredibly important during the final debate.

AN IMPORTANT CAUTION: We already know that the bidi industry will try to undo the decision made last Saturday despite the fact that the decision was announced as final and unchangeable so the fight isn't over by any means. At the same time, what has been accomplished would never have happened but for the advocacy we and our partners supported on behalf of the Bloomberg Initiative and without a campaign that included all of the components of this campaign.

> Matthew L Myers