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Current pictorial tobacco warning ineffective: Survey

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The current pictorial health warnings used on Indian tobacco products are ineffective compared to the pictorial warnings mandated in 2006 and present international health warnings, as per a recent survey.

Among the different types of tobacco users the percentage of tobacco users who either read or looked at the warning labels was low compared to other countries, according to national survey conducted by Healis-Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, an anti-tobacco advocacy group.

It was found that only 20.6 per cent of cigarette smokers, 15 percent of bidi smokers and 13.2 per cent of smokeless tobacco users either read or looked at the warning labels while this was reported as 91 per cent in Canada from a survey conducted in the year 2000.

During the study, three sets of pictorial health warnings current, mandated in 2006 and international pictorial warnings were used. Around 68 per cent of respondents were very alarmed when it showed graphic image of surgeons operating a heart with a text message 'smoking clogs the arteries and causes heart attacks and strokes', and 53.3 per cent of the respondents wanted to quit after seeing this image.

The survey also found that 65 per cent were alarmed when they were shown the graphic image mandated in 2006 depicting a grotesque picture of oral cancer with a message-Tobacco causes mouth cancer-and 48.6 percent wanted to quit after seeing it.

Further, a study found that 58.4 per cent were alarmed when they were shown an explicit pictorial warning mandated in 2006 that depicted pictures of a patient with post surgical cheek with a text message-Tobacco causes slow and painful death-and 47.8 per cent respondents wanted to quit after seeing it.

When the currently mandated pictorial warnings depicting graphic image of X-ray lung were shown, only 36.7 were alarmed and 40 per cent of the respondents wanted to quit after seeing it. After showing the pictorial warning depicting a scorpion, only 36.7 per cent were alarmed and a mere 30.8 per cent wanted to quit after seeing this graphic image, it said.

When the graphic image depicting a diseased lung with the warning-Tobacco causes cancer-was shown, only 41.4 per cent of the respondents were alarmed and 30 per cent were motivated to quit after seeing the image.