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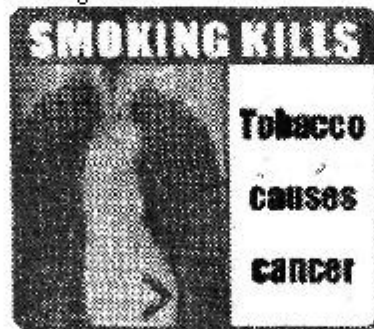
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Picture warnings tobacco products ineffective: Study

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FOR a country with over 40 crores of its population under 18, India has been on the hit-list of major tobacco companies across the globe, with most latching on to the trend of 'catching the adolescent young.

It was with a view to combat this emerging 'tobacco epidemic' that the Supreme Court took a firm stand on May 31, which mandated the tobacco industry to provide pictorial warnings on 40 per cent of the front panel area of tobacco and gutkha packets. They were asked to depict the warning with



images of cancerous lungs, scorpions, etc.

However, if the results of the study conducted by the 'Healis-Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health', these mandated warnings are "not only being violated but also largely ineffective".

Terming the issue of pictorial warnings on tobacco products "a long running battle", Dr P C Gupta, director of the Institute said: "The mandate thrown up by our study of the actual situation in the market is startling. Cigarette companies are not abiding with the law and blatant indifference will mean open invitation to a tobacco war."

According to Dr Gupta, a close observation revealed that most packets did not meet the mandated 40 per cent coverage, but instead covered barely 10 per cent of the principal display area. "Also, the warnings were mostly in English and the 'scientific pictures' confused the consumer," he added.

The study that spanned a period of six months was conducted in a three-step procedure, which included a thorough analysis to track the level of implementation of the pack warnings vis-a-vis the law, creation of focus groups and a field research based on focussed group discussions.