

Original Research

Health Warnings over Cigarette Packets Impact on Smokers within Population of North Bihar

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ABSTRACT:

Smoking tobacco in form of cigarette have health warning over the packets cover the purpose of health warning for the consumers is about the potential risks of the product on its usage. Even though the warning boldly and clearly shows that cigarettes is cancer causing product which may lead to death, their effect on smokers is questionable. This questionnaire based study was carried out among cigarette smokers of population residing in North Bihar to know the impact of health warnings printed over cigarette packets on smokers.

Key words: Cancer, Cigarettes, Smokers

Received: 20 October, 2019

Accepted: 20 January, 2020

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This article may be cited as: Chandra S, Shankar D, Nanda M, Anjan R, Bharti G. Health Warnings over Cigarette Packets Impact on Smokers within Population of North Bihar. J Adv Med Dent Scie Res 2020;8(2):41-44.

INTRODUCTION

“Cancer” is a group of diseases involving abnormal cell growth with the potential to invade or spread to other parts of the body^{1,2}. This is one of the deadliest diseases to affect the humans is largely associated with our lifestyle choices. Tobacco consumption is taken into account to be the leading cause of cancer worldwide about 22%, also causing general degradation of public health. Even the government tries to demotivate the population by written and pictorial health warnings on cigarette packets. The Government of India “Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act” from May 2009 mandates pictorial health warnings on packages of tobacco products to educate and warn consumers about the ill effects which should be not less than 40 % of the display on the packet.^{3,4}

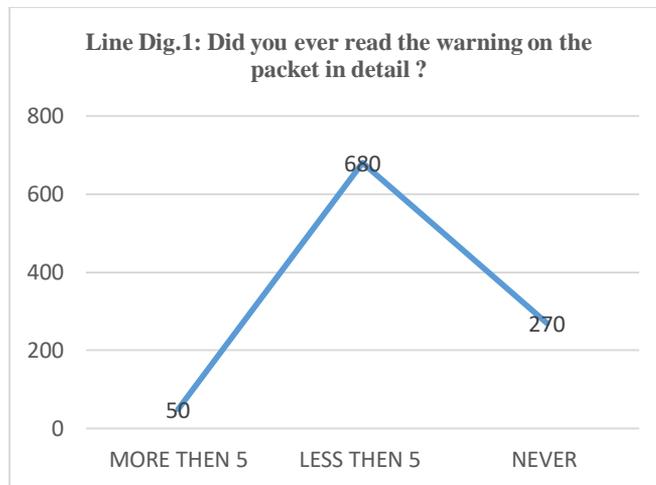
However, these warnings are mostly ignored by smokers completely. Now the big question that arose was that, does warning over the packet has any impact on the Indian consumer’s attitude towards smoking and if it did, was it sufficient to make him quit the habit of smoking. This study was conducted to understand the influence of such warnings on smokers within the population of North Bihar.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

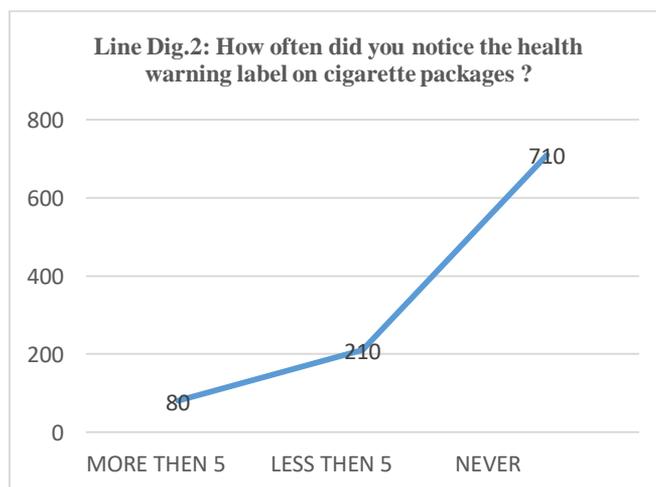
1000 patients who are visiting different dental clinics of North Bihar for their oral and dental problems and were habitual cigarette smokers were included in this study. During oral examination by their dentist, the smokers were questioned about the habit and warning on the packet of cigarette that they use to smoke.

Sr.no	Questions	Answer (options)
1.	Did you ever read the warning on the packet in detail or look at the picture closely?	a) more than 5 times b) less than 5 times c) never
2.	How often did you notice the health warning label on cigarette packages during the past month?	a) more than 5 times b) less than 5 times c) never
3.	Did it ever motivate you to quitting smoking?	a) more than 5 times b) less than 5 times c) never
4.	Do you think you can have cancer due to smoking?	a) yes b) no c) don't know
5.	Did it ever stop you from smoking while taking the cigarette out from the packet?	a) more than 5 times b) less than 5 times c) never

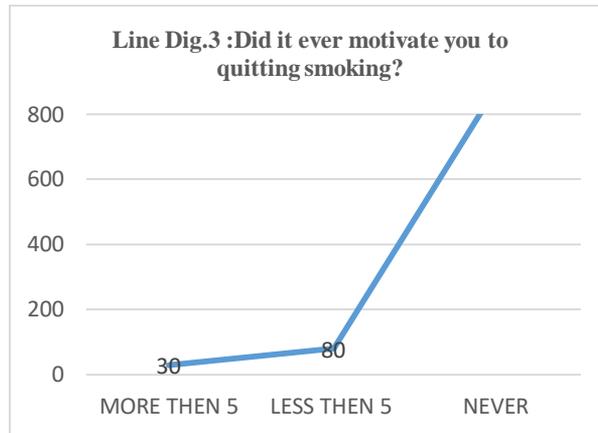
1. Did you ever read the warning on the packet in detail or look at the picture closely?
270 smokers had never read the warning while 680 had read the warning but less than 5 times and only 50 had read more than 5 times. (Line Dig.1)



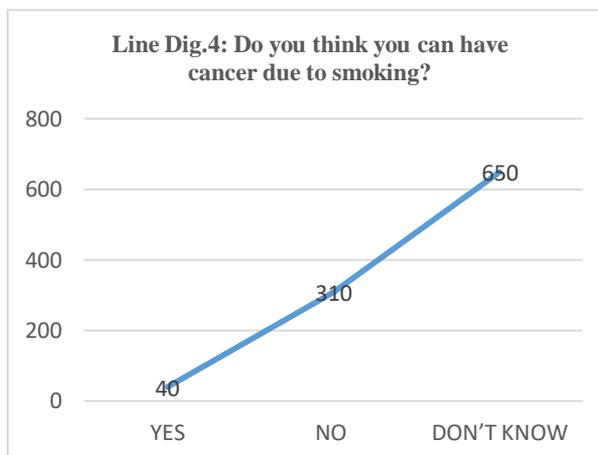
2. How often did you notice the health warning label on cigarette packages during the past month?
710 smokers accepted that they had never actually noticed the warning during the past month while 210 said they noticed less than 5 times and 80 noticed more than 5 times. (Line Dig.2)



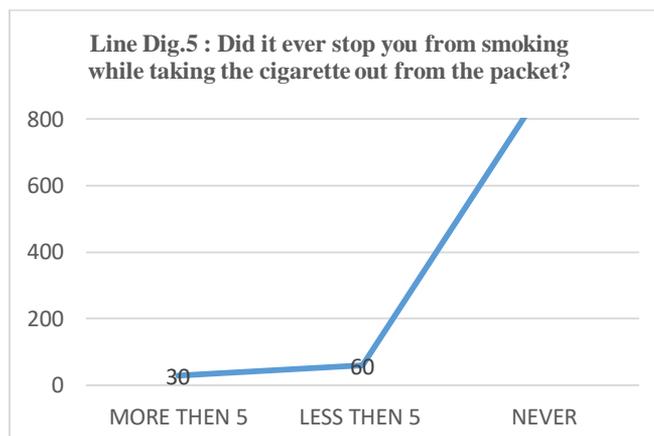
3. Did it ever motivate you to quitting smoking?
 890 smokers did not get motivated to quit smoking on looking at the pictorial warning while 80 did get motivated but did not actually quit smoking permanently (Line Dig.3)



4. Do you think you can have cancer due to smoking?
 310 smokers believed that they will not get cancer while 40 accepted that they might be at a risk. The majority comprising of 650 individuals didn't know anything about the risk of development of cancer (Line Dig.4).



5. Did it ever stop you from smoking while taking the cigarette out from the packet?
 910 smokers revealed that the warning had never prevented them from smoking while 60 had actually got influenced by it and did not smoke at that time but it was less than 5 times. 30 individuals did not smoke more than 5 times (Line Dig.5).



DISCUSSION

Tobacco smoking is a serious health hazard that can cause a number of life threatening diseases like cancer, lung and cardiovascular diseases. Various methods are being used by the government to discourage the use of cigarettes of which one is the pictorial health hazard warning over the cigarette packet itself which has been made mandatory since may 2009 (Fig 1)⁵. But the question that arises is that is it actually serving its purpose. This study was carried out among the troops posted in Punjab and Assam to check the effectiveness of the warnings over the packets. It was observed that 71% of the subjects reported that they did not notice the warning over the packet at all during the past month while 21 % did notice the warning but less than 5 times and only 8 % had noticed the warnings more than 5 times. 68% of the troops reported that they had seen the pictures in detail but less than 5 times while 27% had seen the pictures and read the material in detail. 5% had never taken out time to look at the warning in detail and considered it to be just an advertisement. 91% of the troops said that the warnings have never prevented them from smoking a cigarette with only 3 % accepting that they had a couple of times dropped the idea of smoking. 89% reported that the warnings had never motivated them to quit the habit of smoking while only 11 % did wish to quit but none of them actually did so. On being asked whether any of the smokers felt that they could develop cancer 65% said that they never thought about it thus did not know while only 4% accepted that they were at risk of developing some kind of disease. Surprisingly 31% believed that they will not have cancer. Most of the smokers believed that healthy individuals do not develop cancer irrespective of the number of smoked cigarettes and years of smoking⁶⁻⁹. It was observed on the completion of the study that most of the smokers were in a state of denial and believed that they were healthy and do not face the risk of cancer or any other tobacco related disease in the future. Similar studies have been conducted in various countries like Canada and Australia⁶⁻⁹ to analyze the effectiveness of the health warnings over the packets and although the pictorial health warnings have been successful in many countries to discourage the use, they have failed in India^{4,5,8}.



Fig.1: Health warning over cigarette packets

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the data collected in this study and similar studies in our country it is concluded that the pictorial health warnings over the cigarette packets have no significant demotivational effect on smokers and have failed to bring about the desired effect.

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