

‘Majority smokers against plan to ban sale of loose cigarettes’

They believe that this decision to reduce tobacco use may instead force smokers to buy full packs

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: An overwhelming majority of smokers do not support the proposal to ban the sale of loose cigarettes and designated smoking areas under the amendments in the law on cigarettes and other tobacco products, according to a study.

A survey conducted across 14 cities, including Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Guwahati and Vadodara, interviewing 1,986 people by non-commercial entity PRAHAR also found that 78 per cent of respondents do not support an increase in age for tobacco consumption from 18 years to 21 years.

“The survey found that 87 per cent of the participants do not support the proposal to ban the sale of loose cigarettes. They believe that this decision to reduce tobacco consumption may instead force smokers to buy full packs which will make cigarettes readily available in their hands leading to an increase in consumption

of tobacco,” PRAHAR (Public Response Against Helplessness and Action for Redressal) said in a statement.

Further, 57 per cent of consumers buy loose cigarettes “as it helps them to smoke less”, while only 19 per cent go for it because it is cheaper.

“Only 7 per cent of respondents felt that a ban on the sale of loose cigarettes will make them smokeless,” it said adding 82 per cent of respondents did not support the ban of designated smoking areas.

On disallowing branding of tobacco products at the point of sale, 76 per cent of respondents said they do not support this proposal, with 55 per cent of the opinion that it would “limit their fundamental right to make an informed decision as branding is a reinforcement of the legality of the product they are buying”.

“This is particularly relevant because the market is flooded with illegal and smuggled products. 25 per cent of the consumers feel that the move will encourage unscrupulous retail-

ers to promote products that give them more margin,” PRAHAR said.

When it comes to increasing the age for tobacco consumption from the current 18 years to 21 years, 78 per cent of respondents said that they do not support the move and 37 per cent believed that it is their fundamental right to decide whether to consume tobacco or not.

“Around 8 per cent also felt that this ban will make younger people below 21 years buy illegal products from underground sources,” it added.

Commenting on the findings of the survey, PRAHAR President and National Convenor Abhay Raj Mishra said, “Consumers believe that the proposed provisions significantly curtail their fundamental rights and freedom to make informed choices and in certain cases will even cause harassment and subject consumers to mental cruelty.”

He further said, “COTPA (Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act) 2020 proposed

amendments are self-defeating as instead of serving tobacco reduction goals, they will distort the market structures and lead to an increase in the growth of illegal and inferior products. What we need is a sustained awareness programme to achieve the goals of tobacco control instead of coercive policy measures.”

The COTPA Amendment Bill 2020 proposed by the Ministry of Health disallows the retail sale of loose sticks of cigarettes, prohibits the sale of tobacco products to persons below 21 years, put controls on in-shop advertising and promotion amongst others.

Menon said it is an established principle that before framing any law which affects a class of stakeholders, the views of the affected party must be sought. However, in the course of framing and seeking public response to the provisions of COTPA Amendment Bill 2020 no attempt was made to seek the views of the consumers and actual users of tobacco products.