SHISHA SMOKING: Ban or not to be ban in Pakistan?

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Smoking is hazardous. Although this statement is heard or read by almost everyone but unfortunately, it is highly understated. Its impact on general population and outcomes of the campaign against smoking are debatable. It is an addiction that has catastrophic effects on health. Tobacco smoking has evolved with time into a more modernized, fashionable, look known as shisha which is becoming more of a status symbol now. Regrettably, it is even more toxic than its traditional counterpart cigarette. It is similar to Hookah but in addition to tobacco, it has some exotic flavors added to it. The question one should really be asking is its safety towards health? The answer, though, is known to many but still they are ignorant to the facts. The concept of tobacco smoking in form of shisha is surrounded by several myths which has made its acceptability among masses increasable. A high percentage of people believe shisha smoking to be rather safe than injurious and in fact nutritious and healthy as it is filtered through water and has additional fruit flavors added to it. Although, shisha smoking does not burn the lungs like cigarette but it does contain known carcinogens that lead to cancers. Another misconception is the absence of the nicotine which is complete based on falsification of the facts and is wrong. Both cigarette and shisha contains equal quantities of nicotine. Amazing facts gets encountered when we compare cigarette smoking with shisha smoking. The shisha smoke contains a higher fraction of carbon mono oxide than does the cigarette. The same is true for nitric oxide levels. It also contains a higher amount of tar along with arsenic, lead and nickel, which are known carcinogens beyond a certain limit. Although, CEA (carcino embryonic antigen) levels are higher among cigarette smokers as compared to shisha smokers but that does not make them safe from it too. Things which are unique to shisha smoking include shared mouth pieces putting the shisha smokers are at high risk of many infectious diseases than their other counterparts. This alone provides sufficient evidence to counter the belief that shisha smoking is safer than cigarette. The higher level of carbon monoxide in shisha corresponds directly to the high level of bound Carbon monoxide to hemoglobin which reduces the capability of hemoglobin to bind oxygen and compromises the oxygen delivery to the tissues. Other than that CO-Hb compound have potential to elicit oral as well as many other forms of cancers too. They also result in increased heart rate and blood pressure and can lead to cardiovascular diseases. It can also have disastrous effects on peripheral and central nervous system and can be even more harmful for
pregnant women and lead to low birth weight babies.

Looking at shisha smoking from Islamic perspective, several religious scholars from Malaysia have declared shisha smoking as haram for Muslims. So, to avoid any confusion and give clarity to the subject, muslim scholars all over the world should look into this matter and give a combine fatwa regarding this practice which should be respected and implemented by all. Till this meeting, Pakistan being an Islamic Republic should also look into this issue on its own like Malaysia. Another important consideration in this regards can be in reference to tobacco smoking as that too has also been declared as unacceptable in Islamic community by the Jurisprudence of Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore.

Shisha smoking in Pakistan has been recently introduced and is been widely accepted among masses, due to its uniqueness and interesting flavors. Moreover, the misconception among the population for shisha being safe for health and that Hookah has been our cultural heritage has also lead to multiplication of the profits related with this business. Its wide acceptance and popularity in general population has lead to introduction of shisha in the menus of the cafes’ and restaurants. Its high prevalence among young individuals particularly those belonging to the elite class can be related with easy affordability and accessibility besides the fact that it is status symbol and fashionable. However, a more worrisome situation is that it is widely acceptable in women too.

Research has shown that around 40% of females are engaged in shisha smoking in Pakistan. It has also been indicated that its popularity is mainly attributed to the curiosity, myths and peer pressure associated with gender and age. Another important factor is lack of awareness that often goes undetectable.

Literature shows that awareness sessions and programs have been effective in reducing the number of shisha smokers giving us a ray of hope that awareness about its toxic effects can lead to higher withdrawal rates from shisha smoking.(8) Moreover, government should discourage all the cafes and restaurants from selling shisha and should form strictly regulated policies as many of such policies from local administrations have failed. An example of which can be seen from the picture above
which clearly shows that despite the efforts so far we have not seen any improvement in the condition. Advertisements showcasing celebrities should not only be made but aired repetitively to create awareness among masses about dreadful effect of this toxic substance. There should be a strict ban imposed by the government on selling shisha to the individuals less than eighteen years of age. There is also a need to make people realize and understand that health hazardous habits are never fashion or status symbol but it can only produce devastating effects on health.

References: