

## ***Bidi* smoking linked to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases**

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New Delhi, January 19: Smoking *bidi* has been linked to increased prevalence and risk of cardiovascular and respiratory complications in men, according to a new study published in medical journal, *The Lancet Global Health*.

Although harmful effects of smoking tobacco products like cigarette have been well established, the effects of smoking tobacco in the form of *bidis* are less known.

A large study aimed at studying effects of smoking *bidi* was carried out in seven centers in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The Indian Council of Medical Research coordinated the study in India. It recruited approximately 15000 men from 158 communities; aged 35-70 years, who were non-smokers, light smokers, or heavy smokers of *bidis*. The men were followed up for an average 5-6 years to study cardiovascular outcomes like myocardial infarction, stroke, heart failure, sudden death, cardiovascular-related death, cardiovascular-related hospital admission, and respiratory complications such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, pneumonia, and tuberculosis.

The study found that smoking *bidi* was associated with a higher prevalence and risk for cardiorespiratory symptoms. This calls for stricter controls and regulation of *bidis* to reduce the tobacco-related disease burden in south Asia, researchers have suggested.

*Bidis* are hand-rolled tobacco products that are generally manufactured in cottage industries, hence, they are inexpensive and their sale is minimally regulated by local and international tobacco regulations. As a result, they are packaged with poorly visible health warnings, researchers said. Also, they appeal to young adults as "natural and safe" tobacco alternatives to cigarettes because they come in herbal and flavored varieties.

At present, South Asia is the second largest consumer of tobacco in the world, with more than 130 million tobacco smokers, majority of them are among the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the population. In India and Bangladesh alone, there were estimated 53 million users of *bidis*.

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