

Emerging trends of Shisha smoking in Pakistani youth

Manzoor Butt

Correspondence:

Dr Manzoor Ahmed Butt

Rawalpindi, Pakistan

Email: drmanzoor@ymail.com



Shisha seller

Origin of hookah smoking

Hubble bubble, hookah or waterpipe smoking historically started in the time of the Safavid dynasty in the Persian Empire. From there, it reached the Indian subcontinent, Egypt and the Levant during the Ottoman dynasty. Hookah smoking is now prevalent over many countries of the world mainly due to immigrants from the native areas.

Introduction

Hookah is a way of smoking dry or wet tobacco through a bowl of water with a tube or pipe. Most people use dry or wet tobacco but some also mix tobacco with molasses sugar. Traditionally it was popular in the old and adult (mainly men) but now it is more prevalent and popular in youth who through their innovations transformed traditional hookah into modern Shisha with the belief of making smoking safe. The incidence of shisha smoking is rising quickly in young boys and even in children in Pakistan. A small number of girls also use shisha on special occasions. This starts as fashion but soon becomes a need due to nicotine addiction.

Shisha smokers mostly use flavored tobacco mixed with fruit or molasses sugar which makes the smoke more

aromatic than cigarette smoke. Popular flavourings include apple, plum, coconut, mango, mint, strawberry and cola. The fruit syrup or sugar renders the tobacco damp, therefore, wood, coal, or charcoal is burned in the shisha pipe to heat the tobacco and create the smoke.

Misconception about shisha smoking

Many people believe that shisha smoking is not addictive because the water used in the shisha / hookah can absorb nicotine. This is not true as only some of the nicotine is absorbed by the water and enough nicotine enters their blood to cause an addiction.

Our youth claim that the Shisha is not just an activity rather its part of an interesting lifestyle that brings along with it good times, good company and great memories. Shisha smoking is typically done in groups, with the same mouthpiece passed from person to person. Shisha cafes are now increasingly popular in Pakistan.

The latest trends in shisha smoking

Many new types of Shisha have been invented. These are marketed with the claim of no or very low toxicity. These include Herbal Shisha, Shisha pens and steam stones. Shisha Pens also known as Shisha sticks are the world's first portable electronic shisha smoking device.

Non-tobacco Hookah Products

Some sweetened and flavored non-tobacco products are sold for use in a hookah. Labels and ads for these products often claim that users can enjoy the same taste without the harmful effects of tobacco. Studies of tobacco-based shisha and “herbal” shisha show that smoke from both preparations contain carbon monoxide and other toxic agents known to increase the risks for smoking-related cancers, heart disease, and lung disease. [1]

Health hazards of Shisha smoking

Shisha smoking has now become an industry comprising of shisha manufacturers, tobacco sellers and shisha café owners. There are false claims of harm reduction and safety as compared to cigarette smoking in print and electronic commercial media by the promoters.

Using a hookah / shisha to smoke tobacco poses serious health risks to smokers and others exposed to the smoke from the hookah. The main ingredient of hookah or Shisha is tobacco. Shisha / Hookah smokers may be at risk for some of the same diseases as cigarette smokers. These include: reduced lung function, lung cancer, heart disease, TB, oral cancer, stomach cancer, cancer of the esophagus and decreased fertility [1]

When someone smokes shisha, he and all sitting near him are breathing in smoke which releases toxins including carbon monoxide and heavy metals like arsenic and lead. Flavored tobacco is smoked over coals and fumes from these fuels add new toxins to the already dangerous smoke. A typical hour long shisha session involves inhaling 100 to 200 times the volume of smoke inhaled when smoking a cigarette. A latest study provides the first evidence about the potential hazards of exposure to waterpipe-associated secondhand smoke. Hazardous particles of various sizes can build up gradually during waterpipe use to reach dangerously high levels presenting a risk to non-smokers and a particular risk to pregnant women. [2]

Social hazards of Shisha smoking

The social hazards of Shisha may affect personal life, family and friends. These may reduce working ability and performance. Shisha smoking is done in groups. Youth is often in a high mood and it is not uncommon to see violence due to non tolerance of various groups. The quest for more pleasure and fun sometimes leads to drug addiction. Some are also involved in unprotected sexual activities leading to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), mostly gonorrhea and hepatitis-B. The long hour sittings cause distraction from studies and other useful and healthy activities like sports.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) have clearly warned that Hookah smoking is not a safe alternative to smoking cigarettes. [1] [2] Tobacco users should quit all tobacco products to reduce health risks.[1] Waterpipes should be subjected to the same regulations as cigarettes and other tobacco products. Waterpipes and waterpipe tobacco should contain health warnings. Claims of harm reduction and safety should be prohibited.[2]

There is an intense need to address the misconceptions about the myths of shisha smoking. We should create healthy and useful activities for our youth. The youth councilors and sports institutions must play their proactive role towards this end.

References

- 1) Smoking & Tobacco Use; CDC
http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/tobacco_industry/hookahs/
- 2) Water Pipe Tobacco Smoking: Health effects, Research needs and recommended actions by regulators (WHO)
http://www.who.int/tobacco/global_interaction/tobreg/Wat erpipe%20recommendation_Final.pdf