



PPS-TOBACCO CONTROL ADVOCACY GROUP POSITION STATEMENT ON RAISING TOBACCO EXCISE TAX

by Rizalina Racquel H. Gonzalez, MD, FPPS
(Chair, PPS Tobacco Control Advocacy Group)
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The Philippine Pediatric Society through the PPS Tobacco Control Advocacy Group is tasked to educate, engage in research and create projects to promote tobacco control with the aim of protecting children's over-all health.

In April 2017, The PPS- Tobacco Control Advocacy Group was formed composed of the General Pediatricians, Adolescent Pediatricians, Ambulatory Pediatricians, Pediatric Pulmonologists and Pediatric Allergologists . In July-September 2017, a nationwide awareness campaign on anti-smoking and anti-vaping in cooperation with the Department of Education and SM Supermalls alongside is a quiz bee and slogan poster making contest reaching more than 6,000 grades 10-12 students from 100 schools covering all regions of the country. This was followed by a post assessment survey in November 2017.

It is important to take note that there is an overwhelming clamor for urgent and effective tobacco control among which is accessibility and affordability of cigarettes and the students awareness of the health hazards of tobacco use and exposure.

Our success was noticed and has been shared with the American Academy of Pediatrics and Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia in April 2018. The PPS Tobacco Control 2017 project template through the Logic Model is now being used by 7 other developing countries in Asia and African countries in our mission to protect children's health and environment from the tobacco use and exposure.

The Philippines has been successful with RA 10351, Sin Tax Reform Act of 2012 and has been the model for the world in significantly decreasing smokers by the said Act, with tobacco use in adults decreasing from 29.7% (2009) to 23.8% (2015) (2). However, specific to children, the 2015 Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) showed an increase to 16% prevalence rate of tobacco users among 13-15 years old Filipino Children compared to 13% in 2009 GYTS (1).

Thus, there is critical need for action to curb tobacco use, especially in the youth. The adolescent brain is highly susceptible to nicotine addiction since early synapses formed specifically in their prefrontal cortex impairs their executive function(mood control and impulse control) by the time they reach the age of maturity, that is by mid 20's. More so, it is well established that there is no safe level of second hand smoke to which the pediatric age group is most susceptible.

We propose and support legislation that will further increase taxes on tobacco AND a ban on selling cigarettes by "sticks".

We support the raising of taxes and thus the price of tobacco products to make it inaccessible, especially to the youth.

Raising taxes is an effective tool for tobacco use control. This has been shown by many studies and projects presented in the March 2018 World Congress on Tobacco or Health in Cape Town, South Africa and the recent October 2018 WHO FCTC convention in Geneva, Switzerland. The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) use the MPOWER strategy and its guidelines to provide the foundation for countries to implement and manage tobacco control.

1. Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies
2. Protect people from tobacco smoke
 - Offer help to quit tobacco use
3. Warn about the dangers of tobacco
4. Enforce bans on tobacco promotion, advertising and sponsorships
5. Raise Taxes on Tobacco

The youth are targeted by tobacco industry as replacement smokers. Of all the six strategies, R or Raising Taxes on Tobacco is the most effective measure in tobacco control specifically to the youth since adolescents are price sensitive. Raising the price of tobacco products makes it inaccessible to them. The 2015 GYTS results show that "three out of five cigarette smokers (60.4%) bought their cigarette from store or shop, while, less than two out of ten students (16.0%) bought their cigarette from a street vendor or got them from someone else".

Students usually buy cigarette brands that cost P20.00-P29.00 (30.6%) and then followed by cigarette brands that cost P30.00-P39.00 (27.8%)

Almost half (47.5%) of current cigarette smokers 13-15 years old were not prevented from buying cigarettes despite their age.

With these findings, raising the price further through raising tobacco excise tax is urgent.

Two laudable bills that would significantly reduce prevalence rate of smoking and would make the price prohibitive to our youth specifically, are:

1. Senate Bill 1599 of Senator Pacquiao whose proposal is "to legislate a tobacco tax reform policy that will increase the unitary cigarette excise tax to Php 60 by 2018 and stipulate a 9% annual increase in the excise tax, thereafter", and
2. Senate Bill 1605 filed by Senator JV Ejercito whose bill aims "to legislate a tobacco tax reform policy that will increase the unitary cigarette excise tax to Php90 by 2018 and stipulate a 9% annual increase in the excise tax, thereafter".

We also propose that retail buying i.e. on stick basis be banned.

Selling cigarettes by "sticks" makes prices seem lower than buying cigarettes per pack as shown by GYTS 2015.

The most common mode of buying cigarette among students who are current smokers and who bought cigarettes during the past days was by individual sticks. Based on their last purchase, four out of five current smokers (81.0%) bought by individual sticks and only 16.9% bought cigarette by pack.

An unpublished research conducted by one of our "Pinoy Kids for Smoke Free Philippines", Narciso and Catingub from Philippine Science High School Eastern Visayas Campus this April 2018 showed parallel results as the 2015 GYTS . Retail buying, on per stick is most prevalent way to buy cigarette affordably by minors. The youngest age of initiation into smoking was 7-8 years old.

Reducing tobacco use, as smoker or through second hand or third hand smoke exposure. will improve the over-all health of our citizens and reduce the economic burden caused by tobacco use and exposure.

Measures to reduce use and accessibility and exposure to tobacco is an important health and economic issue knowing that many among the top non communicable diseases like stroke, COPD, lung cancer, pneumonia, ischemic heart disease, tuberculosis and asthma are health burdens faced by our country . Health expenses covered by Philhealth and soon by our Universal Health Care will be significantly augmented by raising our tobacco excise tax. Reducing smokers and second hand and third hand smoke will significantly reduce also the economic burden of covering for these diseases caused by tobacco use and exposure .

REFERENCES:

1. 2015 Global Youth Tobacco Survey
2. 2015 Global Adult Tobacco Survey
3. Unpublished research paper, April 2018, Narciso and Catingub, " Smoking of Adolescents aged 13-15 from Tacloban City: A Comparative Analysis",DOST, Philippine Science High School,Eastern Visayas Campus,Palo,Leyte.