

Gutka in All But Name: The Presence of Chewing Tobacco and Pan Masala Double Packs in Five States in India

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Background

- Nearly 200 million individuals use smokeless tobacco (SLT) products in India
- Gutka, a popular product that combined chewing tobacco and pan masala spices in one packet, was banned across all of India in 2013
- After the ban, individual chewing tobacco and pan masala packets were sold as a stapled pair from the vendor: these double packs allowed the user to recreate gutka
- Maharashtra bans the sale of pan masala, flavored SLT, and any other product that facilitates the mixing of tobacco and spices by consumers, including single use packets

Objective: To examine the prevalence of chewing tobacco and pan masala double packs in rural India

Methods

- We systematically collected unique SLT products and any accompanying spice packets vendors sold to consumers in rural India as part of the Tobacco Pack Surveillance System (TPackSS) project
- Twenty-five towns (<50,000 people) were visited across five states: Assam, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Karnataka
- 240 state-unique SLT packs and 121 spice packets were collected, visually inspected for product type, and double coded

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Results

Smokeless tobacco products purchased as single and double packs in rural India

	Gutka	Chewing Tobacco		Unknown ¹		Other ²		Total
		Single Pack	Double Pack	Single Pack	Double Pack	Single Pack	Double Pack	
Assam	0	7	7	12	12	4	0	42
Karnataka	1	2	9	4	15	5	0	36
Maharashtra	0	3	2	12	9	4	0	30
Rajasthan	0	1	14*	8	10	9	0	42
Uttar Pradesh	2	13	33*	25	10**	7	0	90

¹Unable to identify based on insufficient labeling on the exterior package

²Includes gul, mishri, nasal/oral snuff, and tobacco paste

*2 had a spice mixture that was pan supari

**3 had a spice mixture that was pan supari

- 3 unique gutka packets were found in 2 out of 5 states visited
- 65 out of 91 (71%) chewing tobacco packs were sold as double packs with a pan spice mixture
 - Uttar Pradesh accounted for about half of all state-unique chewing tobacco/pan masala double pack combinations purchased
 - Maharashtra had the least amount of state-unique chewing tobacco/pan masala combinations purchased
- Pan masala was purchased alongside unknown SLT products 48 percent of the time (56 out of 117 purchases)

What is a double pack?

The double pack combines a tobacco and spice packet. These products were initially sold as a pair by vendors for consumers not aware of the gutka ban. With consumers now aware of the ban and practice, packs are nearly universally sold together.



Gutka purchased in Uttar Pradesh



Conclusions

- Three gutka packets – without Indian warning labels – were found in two states, suggesting there is general compliance with the letter of the law
- Consumers are still able to recreate gutka using chewing tobacco and pan masala packets, which are available for purchase in all states sampled
- The flavored SLT and pan masala ban in Maharashtra shows progress in curbing the availability of these products when compared to states without a ban
- Limitations exist when visually identifying SLT products; almost half of SLT products were unable to be classified
- These results should be considered as state governments consider strengthening existing bans or proposing new SLT policies