

Institute for  
Global Tobacco Control

# Perceptions of Current and Proposed Standard Bidi Packaging in Bangladesh

*Raniyan Zaman, Lauren Czaplicki, Sanjana Balagere, Sejal Saraf, ABM  
Rasheduzzaman, Mohammad Shamimul Islam, Joanna Cohen*

*March 21, 2024*

# Acknowledgement & Disclosure

- This work was supported with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies' Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use ([bloomberg.org](http://bloomberg.org))
- There are no personal financial relationships with commercial interests to disclose



# Bidis

- Tobacco hand-rolled in tendu leaves
- Smoked by 5.3 million adults in Bangladesh
- Roughly eight times cheaper than commercial cigarettes
- Disproportionately consumed by men with low socioeconomic status



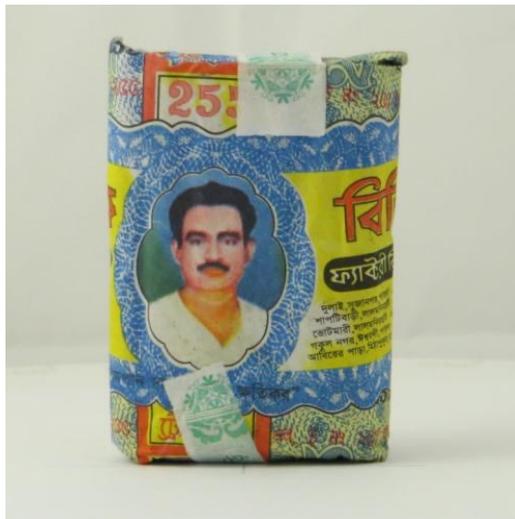
# HWL Requirements in Bangladesh

- The 2013 Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act requires bidi packs to include a graphic health warning label (HWL) that covers the top 50% of the front and back of the pack.



# Low HWL compliance

- Compliance with HWL guidelines in Bangladesh is poor:
  - A 2017 study found that over 80% of bidi packs did not have HWLs printed on both sides of the pack
  - Around 30% of warnings on bidi packs did not meet the size requirements



Ex: no HWL present



Ex: wrong size/placement



Ex: HWL distorted, on bottom



# Standardized Pack Size/Shape

- Implementing a standard size and shape could increase HWL compliance and decrease product branding.



# Study Objective

- Qualitatively explore how men who currently use bidis and those who have never used tobacco perceive:
  - Current bidi packs
  - Proposed standard bidi pack size and shape
- Explore the role that HWL placement on current and standard bidi packs plays in harm perceptions





# Methods

# Study Approach

- 14 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 98 participants in February and March 2021
- Participants were recruited from low-income urban and rural areas in 3 states (Dhaka, Khulna, Sylhet)
- Participants had to live in a pre-determined neighborhood selected through a systematic sampling approach and be able to speak/read Bangla.



# Participant Eligibility

## People who currently use bidis

- $\geq 18$  years old
- Reported smoking bidis on at least one of the past 30 days

## People who have never used tobacco

- 18-35 years old
- Reported **never** having used any tobacco product



# Bidi Pack Stimuli

Existing bidi packs purchased on the market



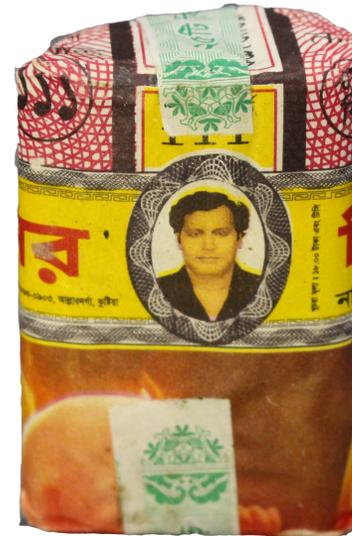
#65



#77



#88



#99

Standard pack



# Focus Group Discussion Structure

- Packs were ranked on three scales for perceived attractiveness, HWL noticeability, and perceived harm
- Each scale was numbered 1 to 5, where 1 corresponded to “not at all attractive/harmful, etc.” and 5 corresponded to “very attractive/harmful, etc.”
- Participants were asked to describe their reasoning for the group rating





# Results

**Table.** Demographic characteristics by tobacco use status (n=98)

|   | <b>Currently use bidis<br/>(n=50)</b> | <b>Never used tobacco<br/>(n=48)</b> |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Age</b> mean (sd)                    | 39.9 years (sd=12.5)                  | 24.8 years (sd=6.6)                  |
| <b>Highest level of education</b> n (%) |                                       |                                      |
| Less than primary school                | 5 (10.0%)                             | 1 (2.1%)                             |
| Primary school                          | 24 (48.0%)                            | 7 (14.6%)                            |
| Secondary school and above              | 21 (42.0%)                            | 40 (83.3%)                           |
| <b>Occupation</b> n (%)                 |                                       |                                      |
| Government employee                     | 3 (6.0%)                              | 1 (2.1%)                             |
| Business                                | 8 (16.0%)                             | 9 (18.8%)                            |
| Farming                                 | 12 (24.0%)                            | 5 (10.4%)                            |
| Industrial worker                       | 4 (8.0%)                              | 2 (4.2%)                             |
| Student                                 | 2 (4.0%)                              | 24 (50.0%)                           |
| Daily laborer                           | 20 (40.0%)                            | 1 (2.1%)                             |
| Self-employed                           | -                                     | 2 (4.2%)                             |
| Unemployed                              | 1 (2.0%)                              | 4 (8.3%)                             |



# Perceived Attractiveness

- **Existing packs:**
  - Packs with bright colors, strong, sturdy pack material, and easy-to-read text were more attractive across all groups
- **Standard pack:**
  - Pack was also seen as attractive across groups and similar features (sturdy material, color) were discussed



# Perceived Attractiveness: FGD Quote

***It (pack 88) doesn't look good at all. The color is very poor. It looks blurry...The packaging of these items seem very bad and it seems that it will anyhow open up right now. The quality of the paper used here is very poor.***

Participant about an existing pack  
(Sylhet, Urban Non-user Tobacco Group)



# HWL Noticeability

- **Existing packs:**
  - All groups discussed how HWLs on most bidi packs had limited visibility and were not placed on packs in ways that complied with current requirements
- **Standard pack:**
  - In contrast, groups discussed how the HWL placement on the standard pack increased the visibility and noticeability of HWLs compared to existing packs



# HWL Noticeability: FGD Quote

***[The brand] gave a seal at the main place where the warning messages is given. They did it intentionally so that it could not be able to see that. Here they give more importance to merchandise their products rather warning the people.***

Participant about an existing pack  
(Dhaka, Urban Non-Tobacco User Group A)



# Perceived Harm

- **Existing packs:**
  - Lack of HWLs or presence of non-compliant HWLs (small, miscolored, only placed on one side) on current bidi packs contributed to lower perceived harm across all groups
- **Standard packs:**
  - Conversely the prominence and visibility of HWLs on standard packs increased perceived harm and reduced pack attractiveness, taking focus away from branded features



# Perceived Harm: FGD Quote

*...we could not understand whether the packet of bidis we looked at earlier were harmful or not...But when we look at the picture [on the standard pack], it seems to us that it would be much harmful for our health.*

Participant about standard versus existing packs  
(Dhaka, Urban Non-Tobacco User Group A)





# Discussion

# Implications

- Implementing a standard bidi pack size and shape may increase HWL noticeability and perceived harm.
- Potential unintended consequences of the standard pack design include increased product attractiveness among consumers.
- Policymakers should consider additional measures:
  - Plain packaging to standardize pack color
  - Restriction on the use of appealing imagery (e.g., brand "owner" portraits)
  - Enhanced enforcement resources to ensure companies follow all standard pack requirements along with HWL requirements



# Limitations

- Did not account for other product features that influence consumer perceptions (e.g., product price)
- Transcripts of FGDs were ultimately analyzed in English and results were confirmed with in-country partners who reviewed transcripts in Bangla, but nuances of issues discussed in Bangla may not be fully reflected in results presented
- Never tobacco user groups did not include adults > 35



# Conclusions

- There is evidence to suggest standardizing bidi pack size and shape will reduce room for attractive branding and increase HWL noticeability and perceived harm.
- Our study fills an important research gap related to perceptions of current and standard bidi packs
- Findings can also help inform standard bidi pack strategies in other countries with a similar bidi context as Bangladesh





**Thank you!**

## Contact

**Raniyan Zaman, BA**

Institute for Global Tobacco Control

Department of Health, Behavior and Society

Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

[rzaman1@jh.edu](mailto:rzaman1@jh.edu)