



## Socio-Cultural Context of Smoking: A Study on Habit of Smoking among the Intermediate Students of a Village of Rajshahi District

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ARTICLE INFO			ABSTRACT
<b>Article History:</b>			<i>Smoking is always thought to be health risk habit almost in every society. It cases deaths and many diseases all over the world. In spite of this, many college students are being addicted to smoking in all countries. There have been many research works regarding college students’ smoking habit where psychological or economic factors have been regarded as cause behind smoking. But there are many social factors which play important roles in smoking, but existing researches neglected this. The current research has been done in the context of a village of Rajshahi district of Bangladesh and aims to know the importance of socio-cultural environment in smoking, and to understand what strategies college reading students occupy in smoking.</i>
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### INTRODUCTION

Smoking is one of the major disease-like situations all over the world because of its rapid spreading feature (Majumder & Shoma, 2019). Tobacco smoking contains mix of more than

7000 poison chemicals, which damages to lungs and immune system, reproduction and child health, and causes aneurysms, heart attack, stroke and cancer. It also makes diabetes harder to control. The nicotine tobacco contains is addictive drugs and can change the chemical balance of brain (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010; Khan, Karim, Alam, Ali & Masud, 2018). People of all class and gender of almost every country are being addicted to smoking (Majumder & Shoma, 2019). Smoking habit of youth is another burning issue which is increasing in recent decades (Barkat *et al.*, 2012). It is true about youth smoking that almost every smokers started smoking in their high school life where they were not aware of its effects on health, or thought they can quit smoking soon (WBB Trust, 2009; Rose & Chaloupka, 2001; Naing, Ahmad, Musa, Hamid, Ghazali, & Abu Bakar, 2014; Moran, Wechsler & Rigotti (2004; Song & Ling, 2011), but were not aware of addictive character of nicotine the tobacco products contain which makes smoking difficult to quit (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010) and become addicted for the rest of their life (Hossain, Hossain, Azad-uz-zaman & Rahman, 2015). Action on Smoking and Health (July 2019) reports that smoking rate in developing countries is increasing.

Bangladesh, a developing country, is one of the largest tobacco consuming countries of the world, which is growing larger in spite of its high poverty (Khan, Karim, Alam, Ali & Masud, 2018; Rahman, Roy & Sultana, 2015; Barkat *et al.*, 2012; Efroymsen and Ahmed, 2003; Efroymsen *et al.*, 2001). The shocking news is that tobacco occurs 161253 deaths each year in Bangladesh and which is 19% of all deaths (WHO, 2018; Efroymsen and Ahmed, 2003). Besides death and diseases, it has economic effects. Parental smoking habit put their children under malnutrition since significant part of income goes after cigarettes rather than food and other basic needs (Semba *et al.*, 2007; Efroymsen and Ahmed, 2003; Efroymsen *et al.*, 2001).

There have been many researches on smoking, child smoking, school reading students smoking, university reading students smoking, college reading students smoking and so on. But socio-cultural environment of smoking got little attention. Basically, it is socio-cultural environment in which man develops as a member of society and pass his whole life, and is a determinant of many a human activity. This environment is not static but complex and varies based on societies and culture. As an indicator, the socio-cultural environment of a locality is meant to play important role as predictor in smoking prevalence and even in smoking quit.

This research aims to explore the socio-cultural environment of college reading smokers of a village of Rajshahi district of Bangladesh with importance.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

The aim of this research is to explore the socio-cultural environment of smoking. Specific objectives of this research include:

- I. to know the importance of socio-cultural environment in smoking, and
- II. to understand what strategies college reading students occupy in smoking.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Hassan, Hossain & Khan (2019) show that 37 percent of the university students of Sylhet division are smoking and about half of them are male students. Smoking rate of the master's students is higher than that of the students of second year. Smoking status is significantly associated with gender, parent occupations, living expenditures and residence type rather than

age, religion, university, level of academic study (in year), enrolled academic faculty or monthly family income. Similarly, Rahman, Karim, Ahmad, Suhaili & Ahmad (2011) found that teachers' prevalence of smoking is high and association with friends who smoke simply help smoking. They collect cigarettes from shops or street hawkers. Their smoking habit creates a chance for their students to smoke. At the same time, Lalithambigai, Rao, Rajesh, Ramya, & Pai (2016) assert that many of the students start smoking at 16 or later. They buy cigarettes from store/ shop/ street vendor. Many of the smoker boys think that smoking makes more friends and they look attractive while smoking.

On the other hand, Ahammed, Ahmed & Uddin (2021) compared between the findings of the year 2007 and 2013, and found that tobacco usage significantly declined from 8.4 to 6.9% over six years. The prevalence of tobacco use decreased among females (5.22 to 2.84%) because of receiving anti-tobacco messages and age restriction of buying tobacco products. But number of male students who smoke is higher than the females. Students who smoke get more money than those who do not. Price rise of tobacco products. Hedmana, Bjerg-Bäcklunda, Perzanowskic, Sundberga, & Rönmarka (2007) also found that at ages 12/13 and 13/14 years, there were no differences in any tobacco use between boys and girls. In all ages, smoking was significantly more common among girls than boys. Smoking family members increase the risk of initiation of both smoking and snuff use. But regular participation in sports plays as an important factor against tobacco use. Further, having asthma did not make the teenagers avoid smoking.

Hossain, Hossain, Azad-uz-zaman & Rahman (2015) found in their study that overall 75.0% teenage smokers became regular in smoking at the age between 13 to 18 years while about 18.8% become before  $\leq 12$  years in present study. The Causes behind the Initiation of Smoking among Teenagers are Get rid of frustration, Curiosity, Peer pressure, Copying parents, elderly who smoke, Desire to fit with friends, For fun and Mental stress. The large number of teen smokers buy cigarette by themselves from the store. Most of the teen smokers used to smoke at around school/collage and some of them were smoking inside school/college premises. Similarly, Khan, Karim, Alam, Ali & Masud, (2018) and Naing, Ahmad, Musa, Hamid, Ghazali, & Abu Bakar (2014) also found same data as Hossain, Hossain, Azad-uz-zaman & Rahman (2015). At the same time, Moran, Wechsler & Rigotti (2004) explored the prevalence of social smoking, the characteristics of social smokers, and the association between social smoking and quitting intentions and behavior among US college students. They found that the college students who spent more time socializing with friends, were binge drinkers, and valued participation in the arts. A social smoking pattern was less common among black smokers than white smokers. All the literature found relevant to student smoking or youth smoking lacks discussion on socio-cultural environment, in which smoking occurs.

## **RESEARCH METHODS:**

This research has been done following qualitative research approach. A village of Durgapur Upozila of Rajshahi district was selected as research area for this research because of appropriateness of the research topic. For collecting primary data, random sampling method was used while selecting the respondent and also to target a specific respondent we have also assessed their knowledge, convenience, and desire to participate in the interview session. For secondary sources or literatures, we have collected literatures both global and local that go with our study objectives and sort it out under larger categorization. For secondary sources, we have

taken into account books and journal found relevant to the issue of interest. Document review method was used as secondary qualitative data collection tool. For primary sources of data, we have addressed different participants: as Santal wage labourers, cowboys, poultry farmers and people depended on hunting, gathering and fishing. Unstructured Interview and observation method were used in order to collect primary data. Individual has been considered as a unit of analysis in the study. The inductive analytical method has been used in this research.

## **FINDINGS**

People as well as college students smoke cigarettes to pass their extra time. There are many shops beside village streets where cigarette and *bir* are available. Generally, the college students who smoke cigarettes buy cigarettes themselves from shops of their village. But when there is a senior person around the shop, they wait till the man stops buying. When there is so many people around the shop, they send one of their friends who is known to other people as a smoker so that other members remain as clean imaged. As a result of buying cigarettes for them, he is awarder with a piece of cigarette or a part of cigarette if there is only one piece of cigarette. When these boys are far from shops and all of them are busy with their work, they send their juniors to buy cigarettes. These juniors are expected to be faithful and intelligent that they will not tell the names of smokers and wait when there are senior people around. These boys are awarded with chocolates, biscuits or any other kind of fast foods of lower price.

College students of the research field smoke cigarettes of high price in public place and of low price, in their rooms and homes since smoking cigarettes of high price is seen as prestigious. When there are girls in front of them, they generally buy cigarettes of high price. It is also prestigious and love-expressing when someone brings foreign cigarettes for them. When they are in towns and far from homes for their few-day-work, they buy *biris* new and unknown to their friends so that they get surprised and also can have the flavor. It is also sometimes prestigious to say in front of friends that their wives and girlfriends are forbidding them to smoke.

They generally smoke cigarettes behind shops where the elders rarely go. When their parents and siblings are outside home, they smoke in toilet. The college students who have personal rooms and whose parents even do not enter their rooms smoke in their personal room. In this case, they smoke with their friends. But those do not have personal room do not smoke beside their home in day time. When they are in schools and college, they choose a place where teachers seldom go. But smoking is not always easy for them. They do not smoke these in front of parents and elders. When they are at school and college, they are very conscious about teachers. But when their teachers come, they hide their cigarettes immediately. Even, if there is a senior person who knows about their smoking, they do not smoke cigarettes in front of him. But if that person permits them to smoke or give them pieces of cigarettes, they smoke in front of him or with him. In this case, they are very conscious so that no other senior people see them.

It is true about the smoker college students of the research field that they many of them do not do any job and that's why they do not earn money. When they need money for the purpose of smoking, they want money from their parents but they tell a lie to them. It is duty of male members of family to go to market to buy things family needs. The male children who smoke cigarettes hide the accurate price of product and save money in order to buy cigarettes. But there are some who earn money but tuition and wage labor. There is tradition in many places of Rajshahi district of Bangladesh that, while hiring laborers, they generally contract to give 350 tk., 1 kg. rice, meal for 1 time and 1 pack of *biri*. The laborers also get times to have a smoke

during work time. Agro wage-laborers make contracts to have cigarettes and they take it in their leisure time. But when it is the volunteer labor asked by a village member, the hirers of labor give only 1 meal and cigarettes. They offer a cup of tea and one piece of cigarette to friends of same age who help.

When any of their friends come to their village for a certain time, they offer them a cup of tea and cigarettes since it is thought as respect for the friend. They are also treated by them in the same way when they meet their friends in their village. It is cricket and football game on tv which make them bid on which team will win. The losers of bid are to offer the others cigarettes. Generally, these cigarettes are of higher price. None of the friend group claim anything except cigarettes since they all know every one's economic capabilities. The loser also believes that their friend will claim nothing but cigarette of high brand and a cup of tea each.

The smoker college students of research field face economic problem when the price of cigarettes increases. They take the cigarettes of low price instead of that of high price. But when their money is very little to afford cigarettes, they buy *biris* since it is cheaper than cigarettes. When it is about the end of the month, they are seen to share a single piece of cigarette with their friends. When there is no work in this locality, they share cigarettes with their friends too. When the price of cigarettes increases, the teenage smokers get angry and disappointed, since many of them are one of the non-earner groups. But they can adapt to new system soon. Furthermore, they share single cigarettes with their friends and thus they take the same cigarette. But when it is the first days of months, they buy the cigarettes of high price since their parents send them money.

It is also seen among them that when they have less money to afford cigarettes, they request the shopkeepers to give them cigarettes in *baki*, and they make contract with them that they will give them the money when they get money. They give money back when they get money according to their contract. But these young students generally do not participate in *Halkhata*, because it creates a chance of being caught by other family members since the shopkeepers give *Halkhata cards* to every customer.

## **DISCUSSION**

Smoking, though thought as a 'bad habit' almost in every culture, has a social construction. There are not only economic or mental issues but also many social, cultural, religious, family, age, academic educational and gender issues related with smoking.

It is true about smoking that students with smoker parents, siblings and peer have greater possibilities of becoming smoker than the students with non-smoker parents, siblings and peer (Hossain, Hossain, Azad-uz-zaman & Rahman, 2015; Tyas & Pederson, 1998; WBB Trust, 2009). Children of Bangladesh can know more about from family and society than its advertisement on media since tobacco advertising on television and radio, in local magazines and newspapers and on billboards is forbidden in Bangladesh (Barkat *et al.*, 2012). The college students of the research field have been seeing their elders and family guests smoking since their childhood, which made sense of smoking. Many college students who smoke are from the families where there their elder brothers smoke. Moreover, there are some college students whose father smokes cigarettes and *biris*. Besides this, when they were school students, they saw many of their teachers to smoke in tea shops and even in school campus. Being indirectly inspired by family members and teachers, many college students of the research field started to

smoke cigarettes in their early age. Significantly, elders' smoking habit indirectly inspire their students to smoke (Rahman, Karim, Ahmad, Suhaili & Ahmad, 2011) and for this reason, the majority of smokers learnt smoking in their early age (Kamruzzam, Hossain & Kabir, 2021).

Again, smoking habit of college students has a strong relation with changes in family structure. It is current tendency that joint family is decreasing and single/nuclear family is increasing because of expansion of educational and employment opportunities, economic and political empowerment of family members, social awareness, science and technology, urbanization and industrialization (Samad, 2015). Both the parents pass all the time outside the home in order to earn money, which results in the lack of care of the children (Boruah, 2017; Samad, 2015). This lonely family environment creates a possibility of making friendship among same age children. In this kind of situation, children fall in a risk of being habituated to smoking. In this case, the college students who spend more time socializing with friends, were drinkers, and valued participation in the arts are in the risk of social smoking (Moran, Wechsler & Rigotti, 2004). Even, in the research field, it is seen that the friendship among smoker college students is very strong and these students have been socialized together and have been playing, chatting and go to educational institutions since their childhood since their parents were busy earning money for family need.

Tradition is another thing, which play important roles in smoking; in the context of Bangladesh, tradition's role in smoking cannot be denied. It is traditional feature of villages of Bangladesh that people with wealth, lifestyle and formal education get prestige and play important role in rural social environment (Rahaman, 1999). Cigarette smoking is also thought as prestigious in village environment from long ago since it is a part of lifestyle of the people with much wealth. Some of the people of the research field are still proud of their ancestors who was one of the first 'cigarette smokers' instead of '*biri* smoker' of this locality. In the same way, people known to smoke cigarette few decades ago in spite of economic poverty and no formal education is also treated as extravagant in this research field. It is seen in the research field that people with higher education and wealth smoke cigarette. When some of the smoker friends of these smoker college students come to their village, they offer cigarette as a part of hospitality and respect. Interestingly, the family heads also offer *biri* or cigarettes to the family guests for the same reason. Murshid (2006) also found that it is a long-practiced tradition of rural Bangladesh to offer cigarette to guests as it is thought as hospitality, politeness and respect for the guests. It is true that people of all economic class are now smoking cigarette for its availability and being cheap. But those who are economically rich and got higher education smoke the cigarettes of comparatively high price. The college students reading in colleges away from home are from economically rich and formally educated families in most. Many of them are seen to smoke the cigarettes of high price when they come home in vacations. Smoking prevalence is also higher among them since they do not need to hide cigarettes in front of the elders and smoke in secrets in the town like village, which has made them more addicted to smoking. On the other hand, the local college students of the research field smoke the cigarette of comparatively high price when they are in the college campus or beside college, and the cigarette of comparatively low price when they are at their village in case their classmates see it and think them economically poor.

Another thing about smoking is that there are restrictions on smoking cigarette based on gender. Basically, tobacco use by gender varies based on countries, societies and ethnicities, and has a

complex association with culture (Hedmana, Bjerg-Bäcklunda, Perzanowskic, Sundberga, & Rönmarka, 2007), and determine smoking habit of a specific gender group. Girls are seen to smoke most in towns and cities rather than in rural areas since villages are more conservative than town. Basically, they have fewer opportunities to smoke due to cultural and social restrictions among females (Hossain *et al.*, 2017; Rahman, Roy & Sultana, 2015). In the research field, it is also expected that the female members of society will not smoke. Even, there is found no college reading girl to smoke cigarettes. Smoking, though thought as ‘bad habit’, can be culturally accepted if old male members of societies smoke. It is also expected in Bangladeshi societies that children and woman are refrain from smoking. Many people of rural area of Bangladesh cannot even think of women smoking cigarettes. For the same reason, there is found no college reading female students smoking cigarettes in the research field. On the other hand, it is rural area of Bangladesh where the old are thought to be respect and their advice is accepted as followable. Even, the old unknown and not from kin relative are also respected. Parents also teach their children to respect the elders. At the same time, patriarchal societies of Bangladesh have well establishment of male superiority over women (Murshid, 2006; Begum, Ali & Bhuyan, 2011). In this case, male old men get superiority in villages, which is well expressed by smoking culture in villages of Bangladesh. There is a tradition of not smoking in front of the elders in the villages of Bangladesh. So, when there is an old man in front of shops, the smoker college students do not smoke and even do not buy cigarettes. In spite of having no economic relation, they hide or throw cigarettes away when they meet well known old men in case elder members of society see them and treat them as bad boys and lessen the access of these students to their house and the old men may forbid their children to make company with them. Interestingly, college reading smokers order their juniors to buy cigarettes for them only because of being senior, and the juniors are expected to do according to their seniors, otherwise it will be impoliteness.

Though price rise of tobacco products is thought to be useful in reducing tobacco use among adolescents and college students in many countries (Ahammed, Ahmed & Uddin, 2021; Majumder & Shoma, 2019), this may not be well applicable in the rural area of Bangladesh. In spite of Bangladesh impose high tax on tobacco products (Barkat *et al.*, 2012) village people of all the classes are seen to smoke since they have many alternatives. It is true that the rise of tobacco products price always puts the smoker college students in different troubles. But the tobacco users of Bangladesh villages can easily cope with this condition. When price of cigarettes rises, the college students of the research field buy the cigarettes of low price instead of the higher prices one, and buy single tobacco sticks instead of whole packet. When they have less money, they buy *biri*. It is also contradicting to Rose & Chaloupka (2001), since they assert that the increased price of cigarette declines the numbers of its users who belongs to high school. As Bangladesh is a country where number of college students are rising in recent years because of high promotion rate from SSC to next class (Khan, Ebney & Haque, 2014) and their friendship bond is being more active, the friend circle of smoker college students help one another in smoking even in the situation when price of cigarettes rise. The smoker college students of the research field share cigarettes with one another when any of them does not have money. Besides this, they also inform the group when a senior person is about to come during smoking.

On the other hand, there is also a tradition of buying things in *baki* in rural areas of Bangladesh. The shopkeepers sell things in *baki* to the village people and people known to him. This kind of

transaction is based on interdependency and faith on social morality and ethics. For this reason, the college students who smoke can buy cigarettes despite having no money and pay money when they get money or earn. This belief is so strong that smoker college students buy cigarettes and *biri* from the shopkeepers without any hesitation because they know that the shopkeepers will not tell it to anybody.

Social environment of smoking of the research field also includes tea-stalls and grocer's shop. In the research field, there are 10 tea-stalls and 10 grocer's shop where cigarettes and *biris* are also found. Moreover, there are 10 grocer's shops and 10 tea-stalls beside the college campus. The college students who smoke cigarettes can easily buy cigarettes from these shops. It is not hyperbole that smoking related materials are easily available to children and adolescents in Bangladesh, which might encourage experimentation and the subsequent development of a regular smoking habit and ultimately addiction (Kamruzzam, Hossain & Kabir, 2021).

It is said that many of the tobacco users do not have knowledge about the effects of tobacco (Rahman, Roy & Sultana, 2015), which may be applicable only for the illiterate and not for the research field. There is readable health warning on tobacco packets (WBB Trust, 2009; Barkat *et al.*, 2012). Since these college students of research field are not illiterate, they can read the warning on cigarette and *biri* packets. Even their family members always forbade them to smoke because of its harmful effects on health and economy. But these college students ignore these warning. Majumder & Shoma (2019) also assert that people ignore the effects of smoking. Basically, the college reading smoker of the research field did not see any patient with cancer, heart attack and stroke, which makes them ignore the serious effects of smoking.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is clear from above findings of the research that socio-cultural environment of villages in Bangladesh favorable to smoking because of tobacco products availability, similar alternatives, favorable smoking place, presence of smoker family members and peer, decline of joint families and lack of proper parental care for their children. Government's initiatives in reducing tobacco consumption by implying more tax on tobacco products fails because of peer internetwork, tobacco sharing and *baki* tradition in transaction. On the contrary, some social morals and tradition of villages of Bangladesh including identifying smoking as bad habit, not smoking in front of elders and social restrictions on female smoking sometimes plays important role in reducing smoking.

This research predicts that the Government's and Development agencies proper initiatives and smoking reducing socio-cultural values can help in building smoke-free college life and smoke-free Bangladesh.

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