

Editorial Shisha Smoking is more injurious to Health than Cigarettes Smoking – Law Prohibits both

Dr. Mohsin Masud Jan

Editor

Shisha smoking is becoming common among youngsters in major cities of Pakistan. Shisha is particularly relaxing because of the atmosphere in which it is taken. Moreover, shisha offers a much more wholesome experience than cigarettes, its smokers say. One session of shisha smoking is said to be equivalent to inhaling 100 to 200 times the volume of cigarettes, according to a report by World Health Organisation.

“If you look at the impact of taking shisha out of this culture, you’re talking about disrupting and destroying a whole pattern of community activity,” protests a shisha smoker as he inhales deeply through the water-pipe in which the scented tobacco is burnt using coal, passed through an ornate vessel.

The sociable nature of shisha smoking makes it popular amongst young people; especially students. Surpassing traditional gender stereotypes, shisha smoking is evenly distributed between both sexes. The reason why shisha smoking integrates so well into student life is because it is relatively inexpensive and gives an opportunity to socialise.

Peer pressure majorly influences such activities, especially for adolescents beginning to gain independence. Participation in such activities induces a feeling of group acceptance. Shisha smoking was widely seen as ‘relatively harmless’ which can be attributed to general ignorance. There is limited knowledge regarding the long-term medical complications of shisha smoking and its addictive nature, however, there is increasing evidence showing some serious health risks. It not only increases chances of cancer, tuberculosis, heart diseases, infection and bacteria from sharing mouth pieces but also reduces male fertility. Moreover, it is said some café walas were mixing drugs in shisha to give a high and were caught doing so which created much hue and cry.

Passive smoking of shisha is also a common concern. Exposing non-smokers to second hand smoke goes against their rights as Prohibition of smoking and

Protection of nonsmokers Health Ordinance of 2002 supports this argument by banning smoking in public places. The definition of public places is often challenged by smokers, but the Article 2(c) of this ordinance clearly defines it and includes auditoriums, buildings, health institutions, amusement centres, restaurants, public offices, court buildings, cinema halls, conference and seminar halls, eating houses, hotel lounges, other waiting lounges libraries, bus stations or stands, sports stadiums, educational institutions, libraries and other such places which are visited by general public.

The Lahore High court on Wednesday clarified that shisha fell within the definition of ‘smoking’ in Prohibition of smoking and Protection of nonsmokers Health Ordinance of 2002. Smoking shisha is allowed but not in public places. And since shisha cafe is a public place, the shisha cafes which continued to serve shisha in rude defiance of the official orders issued by the city government under article 144 of Code of Criminal Procedure, need to stop serving it. Café owners led to a last ditch battle to exempt shisha from ban by proposing that they should be allowed to serve shisha in enclosed cabins or smoking in outdoor portions but LHC rejected that petition too.

This judgment is not well received by shisha smokers and many people anticipate that not serving shisha in cafes would cause shisha smoking to eventually fade away, ending the shisha pandemic. However, the cafes are no longer required to facilitate the smoking as shisha is widely available. It is a sad reality that if they are not allowed to smoke shisha in cafes the youth will turn to alternatives, and start smoking in private places such as homes and cars, once they master the art of assembling shisha.

Federal, Provincial and City Governments should take serious action against the cafes which provides shisha to youngsters.