



Bidis: An Overview

The Indian market of smoking tobacco is dominated by bidis (also known as beedis and biris) which actually consists of shredded tobacco, hand rolled in a tendu leaf secured with a colorful string at one end. Bidi are usually smoked by men, but produced mainly by women and young children who roll them in their homes. Bidis outsell cigarettes by a ratio of eight to one (8:1) in India.

Bidi smoking kills

- Bidi smoking has been shown to increase the risk of chronic bronchitis, tuberculosis, and respiratory diseases.
- A study in Bangalore found that smokers of 10 or more bidis per day were over 4 times more likely to have a heart attack than nonsmokers.
- Studies in India show that bidi smokers have 5 – 6 times greater risk of lung cancer than nonsmokers as well as high risks of oral cancer.
- A study in Tamil Nadu demonstrates that about half (47%) of deaths of rural men from tuberculosis (TB) are caused by bidi smoking.
- A study in Mumbai reported death rates to be 64% higher among bidi smokers compared to non-tobacco users. Even among smokers of less than 5 bidis a day, the death rates were 42% higher.
- Bidi smoke delivers more tar, carbon monoxide and nicotine than western-style cigarettes, and therefore Bidis are more or equally harmful as cigarettes.

Bidi rolling forces the poor to remain in perennial poverty

- The minimum wage fixed by state governments for rolling 1000 bidis varies from Rs. 29.0 in Tripura to Rs. 64.8 in Gujarat.
- After continuous exposure to tobacco, the

skin on the fingertips begins to thin and they become inefficient in rolling bidis at about the age of 45. Many are forced to resort to begging when they can no longer work.

Tobacco cultivation and bidi-rolling cause serious occupational hazards to the workers and their families

- Studies show that those working in tobacco harvesting have evidence of nicotine in their urine. Exposure to nicotine facilitates addiction.
- Bidi rollers experience exacerbation of tuberculosis, asthma, anaemia, giddiness, postural and eye problems, and gynecological difficulties.
- When bidis are stored in the house, food spoils quicker and family members experience nausea and headaches.

Women and children share the greatest burden of bidi production

- Nearly 225,000 children are engaged in bidi making.
- Women constitute 76 – 95% of total employment in bidi manufacturing.
- Female bidi rollers report verbal and physical abuse based on gender and caste differences.