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Emerging Trends in Tobacco and Nicotine Products Consumption in Zambia: Implications for Public Health and Policy



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Key Takeaway

The rapid increase in the consumption of new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products (NETNPs) in Zambia, predominantly among young, unmarried males, poses significant public health concerns. The study “Consumption of New and Emerging Tobacco and Nicotine Products in Zambia: Implications for Policy” found that many consumers of new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products believe these products are less harmful than traditional tobacco products. The study recommends tobacco control awareness campaigns, and the formulation of effective policy on controlled consumption of NETNPs.

1. The issue

The consumption of new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products (NETNPs) is rapidly increasing worldwide, including in Zambia. These products, which include e-cigarettes, water pipes (shisha), and bidis, among others, are often perceived by consumers as less harmful than traditional tobacco products. This perception is largely due to the belief that these products filter out harmful chemicals from tobacco. However, studies have shown that NETNPs do not entirely filter out harmful chemicals and may even expose users to more harm over longer periods of time.

The consumption of these products is particularly prevalent among young, unmarried males, and those in low-income levels. Furthermore, those who have attained tertiary level of education were found to be the highest consumers of NETNPs.

The issue is further complicated by the lack of clarity in the pricing and taxation of these products. In Zambia, the emergence of NETNPs presents unclear pricing and taxation dynamics, coupled with limited evidence on the situational nature of NETNPs consumption control and taxation.

The lack of data on the actual types of NETNPs that have gained wide acceptance among consumers and the lack of clarity in the pricing and taxation of these products exacerbates the problem. This situation calls for an urgent need to investigate the consumption and taxation of NETNPs in Zambia, with the aim of informing the design of effective policies and interventions to control their use.

2. Key findings and implications

Target groups vulnerable to the appeal of NETNPs:

The study found that the consumption of new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products (NETNPs) in Zambia is prevalent (80.4%), especially among young, unmarried males, including those in low-income levels and those with tertiary education. This suggests that these demographic groups are particularly vulnerable to the appeal of NETNPs, which are often marketed as less harmful alternatives to traditional tobacco products.

Misperceptions of NETNPs:

The study also found that these perceptions of reduced harm are misguided. NETNPs do not entirely filter out harmful chemicals from tobacco, and in some cases, they may even expose users to more harm over longer periods of time. This finding underscores the urgent need for public health interventions to correct these misconceptions and educate the public about the true risks associated with NETNPs.

Tax effect on NETNPs:

In terms of taxation, the study found that significantly increasing the tax on NETNPs can deter many people from consumption. This suggests that taxation could be an effective tool for reducing the use of these products. However, the study also found that many consumers would likely continue using NETNPs even if prices increased, indicating that taxation measures should be complemented by other strategies to discourage use.

The study's findings have important implications for public health policy in Zambia. They highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to address the use of NETNPs, including gender-responsive interventions, awareness campaigns, and policy reforms. They also underscore the importance of addressing the economic factors that influence NETNPs use, such as income levels and taxation policies.

3. Main policy recommendations

The study recommends the following policy interventions:

Gender-specific tobacco prevention interventions:

Given the higher prevalence of male consumers of new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products, it's crucial to develop gender-specific policies. These policies should aim to reduce consumption among men, who were identified as the primary consumers of these products.

Interventions could include mass health communication campaigns specifically targeting men, counseling programs tailored for male consumers, and the establishment of toll-free lines to provide assistance and support for men engaged in the consumption of these products.

Tobacco control awareness campaigns:

The study found that many consumers of new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products believe these products are less harmful than traditional tobacco products. This misconception underscores the need for comprehensive awareness campaigns, particularly targeting young and educated populations. These campaigns should aim to dispel misconceptions and educate the public about the health risks associated with these products, emphasizing that they do not filter out harmful chemicals and may even expose users to more harm over time.

Increasing taxes on NETNPs:

To deter consumption of these products, the study recommends considering a significant tax increase on new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products, suggesting an increase of at least 50%. The study found that substantial increases in the excise tax rate would be required to discourage people from using these products.

Removal of differentiated tax rates:

Currently, locally manufactured and imported tobacco and nicotine products are taxed at different rates. This differentiated taxation goes against the principles of National Treatment under WTO law and can hinder tobacco control policies by encouraging consumers to substitute imported products for locally manufactured ones. The study recommends eliminating these differentiated tax rates.

Formulation of policies on NETNPs:

Zambia currently lacks a clear policy on new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products, which could undermine efforts to control the consumption of these products. The government should develop policies and strategies aimed at curbing the growing trend in the consumption of these products. These recommendations are based on the study's findings and aim to address the growing consumption of new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products in Zambia. Implementing these recommendations could help reduce the consumption of these products and mitigate their associated health risks.

4. Further reading:

For more detailed information, please refer to the full study:

Consumption of New and Emerging Tobacco and Nicotine Products in Zambia: Implications for Policy.

<https://elibrary.acbfpact.org/acbf/collect/acbf/index/assoc/HASH01b3/4e01f904/eb7f562b/ffce.dir/Consumption%20of%20New%20and%20Emerging%20Tobacco.pdf>



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