

Enforcement of tobacco ban in prisons an uphill task: IG Prisons



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"One of the biggest dilemmas the prison administration is facing today is whether to ban the use of tobacco in all forms in the prison or not" according to ST Ramesh, Additional Director General of Police in Karnataka who is also the Inspector General (Prisons).

"In any case, the enforcement of tobacco ban in prisons is going to be an uphill task!" he further adds.

Tobacco use inside jail in India and other countries has been alarming. Many jails have even reported use of injecting-drug-use among their inmates. It raises serious concerns on the extent to which such living conditions which make these jails a 'correction facility' for its inmates.

Recently earlier in April 2008 Nagpur Central Jail had created news when all tobacco products were removed from the Jail canteen, despite of the fact that the jail manual allows sale of tobacco in the canteen.

"Government is spending a big amount on the health of the prisoners. Tobacco is injurious to health," explained Surinder Kumar, deputy inspector general of police, prisons (eastern region).

Several young prisoners dying in the jail has recently raised concern that prompted him to take the decision, he added.

Kumar said that the tobacco use, particularly by prisoners suffering from ailments like tuberculosis and HIV, is dangerous. Recently in one of the most comprehensive studies on tobacco use and habits done in India, it was found that tuberculosis (and not cancer) was the biggest cause of death for tobacco-users.

"Apart from ruining one's health, passive smokers also become victims in jail due to restrictions on their free movement," he said.

However to safeguard public health interests and enable other jail authorities to enforce better healthcare facilities inside their premises, the Jail manual must be amended and 'sale of tobacco in jail canteen' provision be removed, said International WHO Awardee (2005) Professor Rama Kant.

Just by rulings of ban-on-tobacco-use it will be difficult to enforce the ban considering the strong addiction tobacco is. The inmates of Nagpur Central Jail need quality tobacco cessation services so that they get properly counseled and assisted to quit tobacco use. Not only prison inmates but prison staff also needs help if they use tobacco in any form, said Prof Kant.

It is imperative for the jail authorities to quit tobacco first and set an example. This shall be a litmus test for the quality of tobacco cessation services which should be made available inside the premises. Tobacco cessation needs to be integrated into the regular healthcare facility of jails, and not be a stand-alone entity. Unless the jail inmates and staff members have an option to benefit from tobacco cessation services and quit tobacco use, it will be a daunting challenge to enforce and police

such 'smoke-free jail' provisions.

Tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death in the world. It causes 1 in 10 deaths among adults worldwide. In 2005, tobacco caused 5.4 million deaths, or an average of one death every 6 seconds. At the current rate, the death toll is projected to reach more than 8 million annually by 2030 and a total of up to one billion deaths in the 21st century.

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