

## Oral Health of Tobacco Chewers: A Cross-Sectional Study in Karachi, Pakistan

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**Abstract :** Introduction: Oral lesions related to commercially available Smokeless Tobacco (ST), such as, Pan, Gutka, Mahwa, Naswar is considered a serious challenge for dental health care providers in Pakistan. Majority of labored Pakistani population consume ST, where public transporters and drivers are no exception. It was necessary to identify individuals of this particular population group and screen their oral health and early signs of pre-cancerous lesions so that appropriate preventive measures could be taken to reduce the burden on health providers. Aim of Study: To estimate Prevalence of ST consumption and perception of use, and to evaluate Oral Health status among public drivers of Karachi. Material & methods: A cross-sectional study survey was conducted over duration of 2 months, through convenient sampling. Sample size (n=615) of public drivers (age > 18 years) all over Karachi was gathered. A structured proforma was used to record socio-demographics, addiction profile, perception of use and oral health status (oral lesions, oral sub-mucosal fibrosis and dental caries) of study participants. Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 16.0 using descriptive statistics only. Results: Prevalence of ST consumption among the study participants was figured to 92.5%. Out of these almost 70% suffered from one or the other form of oral lesion(s). Four major types of ST consumption were observed out of which 60 % of oral lesion were related to Gutka chewers showing early signs of oral cancer. In addition, occurrence of Oral sub-mucosal fibrosis (OSF) was found to be significantly high around 54.8%. Overall dental caries status was also high, showing on an average 5 teeth of an individual were decayed, missing or filled deviating from WHO normal criteria (mean < 3). It was thus proven from the study that public drivers relied on oral tobacco consumption because it helps them 'Improve consciousness' (p-value: < 0.01; using chi-square test). Multivariate analysis showed that there were higher prevalence of smokeless tobacco among highway drivers versus local drivers (A.O.R: 2.82 [0.83-9.61], p-value: < 0.01) Conclusion: Smokeless tobacco (ST) consumption has a direct effect on oral health. However, the type of ST, the duration of consumption are factors which are directly related to the severity. Moreover, Gutka may be considered as having most lethal effects on oral health which may lead to oral cancer and affect individual's quality of life. Specific preventive programs must be undertaken to reduce the consumption of Gutka among public transporters and drivers.

**Keywords :** smokeless tobacco, oral lesions, drivers, public transporters

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