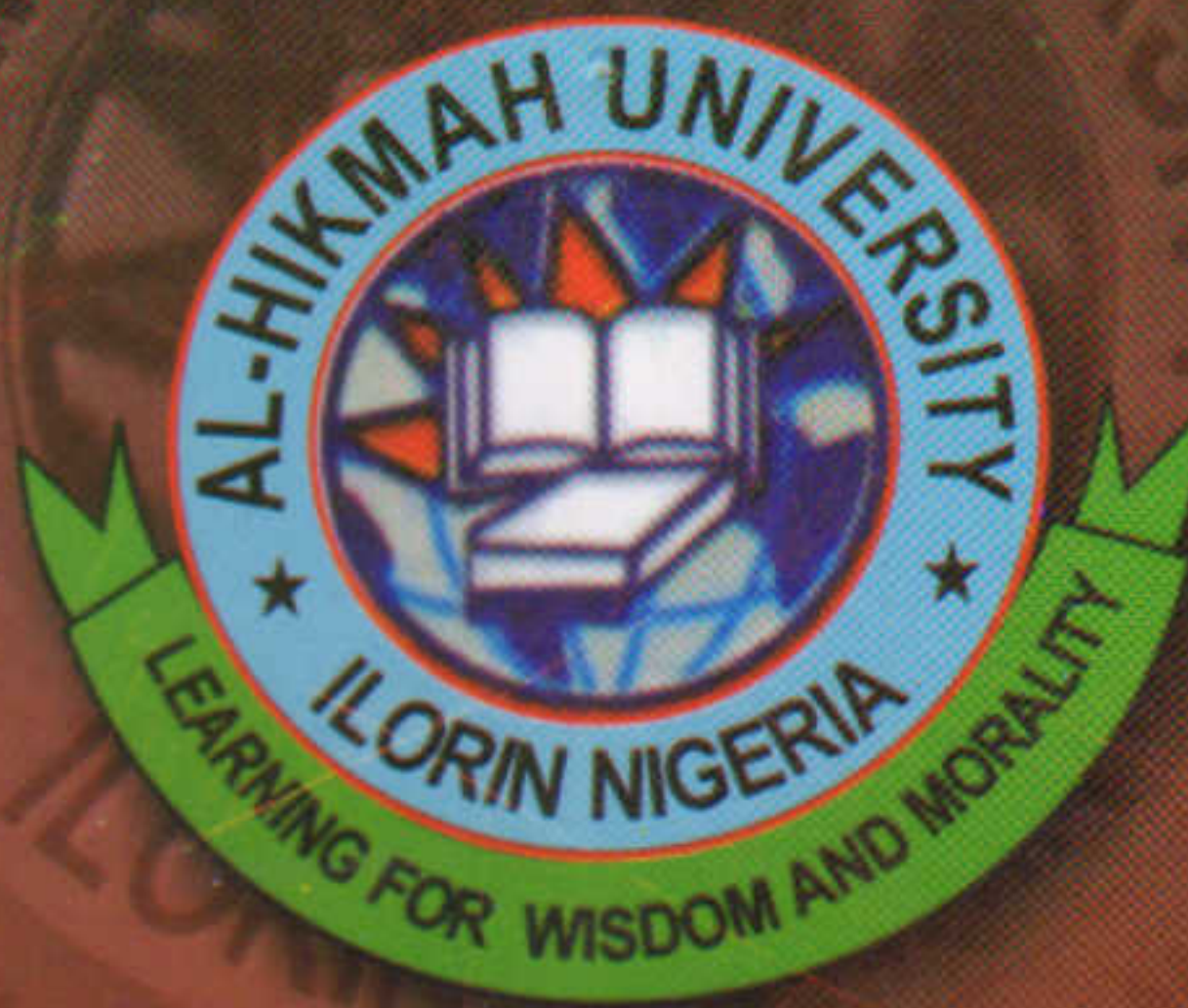




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TOBACCO SMOKING: AN ASSESSMENT FROM MEDICO – ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Smoking is as old as tobacco itself. It becomes popular during the First World War when the government of the United States supplied its troops with cigarettes in order to keep them happy. As part of their contributions to the U.S government during the Second World War, the American Tobacco Companies supplied the military troop packages of cigarettes and this continued even during the Korean wars.¹ After the wars, there were demands for more cigarettes and this made tobacco industries more buoyant. The habit of smoking first appeared in the Middle East, around the year 1000 A.H, while tobacco cultivation in Nigeria became commercialized in 1936 when the Nigerian Tobacco Company (NTC) firmly established its operation.²

When it was obvious that smoking is harmful to health, various organizations started kicking against it. The fifth World Conference on smoking and Health organized by the Canadian Council on Smoking and Health was held at Winnipeg, Canada, in 1983. Also the World Health Organization (WHO) set up an Advisory Panel to look into the effects of smoking on human health.³ Series of researches have been carried out by various health organizations, and it is the reports of their findings that the present writer wishes to use as a yardstick to measure the Islamic standpoint on cigarette smoking.

WHY DO PEOPLE SMOKE?

One wonders why people become addicted to tobacco smoking. However various reasons have been advanced for this. Some see it as a social habit while some smoke out of their ignorance of its side effects. The odour is attractive to

some while some smoke for no reason other than mere imitating friends and peer groups. Young people smoke because it makes them feel grown up. Apart from the social reasons, the sale of cigarette brings in huge income for manufacturers and the governments. It is said that tobacco is a major export crop and the eighth largest in the world in terms of agricultural export.⁴ This is equally asserted by Adesinmi when he writes:

"The tobacco processing industry which derives over 90% of its leaf input from the domestic economy and which employs some thousands of Nigerians is one of the few such industries which seem to have been successfully established, thus contributing substantially to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product".⁵

In view of the above, Akhtaruddin et.al opines that it was due to the economic benefits accruable from tobacco that big tobacco manufacturers dismiss the bad effects of smoking and hence enlist or "patronize not only physicians but also political leaders and parties to promote their business" using the media to achieve their selfish economic benefits.⁶

Some young smokers get themselves in smoking habit because they see their parents smoking, while it is the advertisement of cigarettes on radio and television that attracts others to start smoking.⁷ Some young ones could not understand why cigarette smoking is being considered harmful. Suffice it to cite how an American teenage boy protested before his parents saying:

"Alcohol and coffee are the choice of your generation; drugs and tobacco are the choice of my generation. The only difference is that your drugs are legal and ours have been made illegal by your generation".⁸

There are some people who are conscious of their religion and are ready to do away with anything that goes against the injunctions of the religion. But such people believe that since smoking is not specifically mentioned in the scripture as unlawful, they are free to smoke as they like. Some Muslims still contend that smoking was not in existence during the time of the Prophet and so he did not declare it unlawful; they become so addicted to it that they find it difficult to do away with.

Lastly, some smokers are so obsessed with cigarette that they turn deaf ear to the campaign against it. Such are smokers who point to some old-age smokers to refute the claim that cigarette smoking cause untimely death.

TOBACCO - SMOKING: MEDICAL VIEW

As a result of the socio-economic reasons for smoking tobacco, it is very late to discover its harmful effects. It was in 1920 that scientific information on the harmful effect of smoking was made available. Despite this, people were adamant and it was in the 1950s that an alarm was raised. The risks involved in smoking are all-embracing as it affects every smoker, male and female. Even those who do not smoke but live or work in the proximity of smokers (passive smokers) also have their own share of the risk.

According to the World Health Organisation (W.H.O), about three million people die each year from diseases caused by smoking tobacco, and it takes twenty-five years of increased smoking within a century for the dramatic effects to show in the country's death rate.⁹ Richard Peto, Senior Reader Imperial Cancer Research Fund of the Radcliffe Infirmary Oxford, England, estimates that if the patterns of tobacco consumption remain what they are now, this figure will reach an annual eight million by the year 2025.¹⁰

According to Ruhani, cigarettes contain nicotine. If a cigarette is held for about two seconds in the larynx, about 70% of the nicotine will be absorbed by the body. The symptoms of nicotine poisoning include nausea, vomiting, extensive production of saliva in the mouth; diarrhea, sight and hearing problems, brain disturbances, dizziness and excessive perspiration.¹¹

Also, a toxin called acrolin found in cigarettes produces a gradual necrosis in the brain cells and this has a very negative effect on the nervous system.¹² Cigarettes also contain tar, which sticks to the inner side of the lungs, trapping dirt and bacteria. The lungs thus become irritated and inflamed, and this leads to coughing. The lungs become damaged and it becomes easier to catch pneumonia and bronchitis; this can eventually lead to cancer of the lungs.¹³

The normal effect of drugs and vitamins on the body is also affected as a result of chemical compounds in cigarettes. Vitamins taken by smokers have lower

concentrations because of less absorption, higher metabolism and faster urinary excretion. Vitamin C deficiencies are common in cigarette smokers, which in turn facilitate the rise in the amount of blood lipids.¹⁴

The World Health Organisation lists the risks in cigarette smoking. These include cancer of the lung, the mouth, the larynx, the trachea and bronchia, the oesophagus, the pancreas, the kidney and the bladder. Others include heart diseases, cerebrovascular and peripheral vascular disease chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Still talking on the serious health effects of tobacco smoking, Umar Faruk has this to say:

"With regards to cigarette smoking, several studies have established its association with the development of cancers in many organs of the body, particularly the lungs and the bladder. Cigarette smoke is known to contain an estimated 4,000 chemicals, which are cytotoxic, mutogenic, antigenic and carcinogenic. Smoking causes the irritation of the respiratory epithelium, poor pulmonary compliance, respiratory failure and is known to enhance thrombosis, anaemia, and delays the healing of gastro-duodenal ulcers. Smoking is now known to be associated with the high incidence of coronary heart disease, cardiomyopathies, arteriosclerosis and congenital abnormalities".¹⁵

Women who smoke expose themselves to more danger than men. Apart from the cancer and heart diseases, cigarettes reduce their ability to have children and at times they have abnormal babies. Their children are shorter, slower to learn and more likely to suffer from chest infections. There is an increased probability of miscarriage, fetal and neonatal death premature birth and low birth-weight in pregnant women who smoke.¹⁶

The passive smokers also stand the chance of being exposed to serious health risks. According to a 1990 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) study, environmental tobacco smoke is as hazardous to one's health as the radioactive gas radon and the most hazardous indoor pollutant. The smoke from the burning of a cigarette includes much harmful substances as carbon monoxide,

cyanide, formaldehyde and tar. These weaken children's lungs, and children breathe their parent's secondhand smoke have high rate of pneumonia, bronchitis and other respiratory – tract infections. They have more instances of coughing, sneezing and middle – ear infections.¹⁷

From the above, it is clear that cigarette is not only dangerous to its smokers but also to those who live or work in the proximity of smokers equally have their own share of its evil effects. Based on this fact the Islamic stand on tobacco/cigarettes smoking will be considered.

ISLAM AND TOBACCO SMOKING

The interplay of religion and science is further appreciated considering the stand of Islam on tobacco smoking. It is quite obvious that the word tobacco or cigarette is neither mentioned in the Qur'an nor in the prophetic traditions. As a matter of fact, Muslims are absolutely guarded and guided by the teachings of the Qur'an and the *sunnah* of the Prophet. A better understanding of the Book of revelation could be facilitated through scientific discoveries although it might constitute a great risk to seek verification of facts of a scientific nature given occasionally in the Qur'an. This is why Sayyid Qutb submits thus:

"The Qur'an deals with something much wider and more comprehensive than all those sciences. It is concerned with man himself, the key to uncovering the facts and mysteries of the world around. The human mind is fully equipped to scrutinize and probe into man's surroundings, and to experiment with and apply the theories he formulates and the tools he invents. The Qur'an concentrates on nurturing man's character, conscience and mind, and laying the sound foundations of the human environment which allows him to make full use of his own hidden potential and that of the world around. Having laid down the groundwork and given man the necessary mental tools and criteria, Qur'an leaves man free to seek and search, experiment, achieve and make mistakes, in all areas of life".¹⁸

It is on the basis of the above that *ijma'* and *qiyas* become the sources of Islamic law in the *Shari'ah*. The use of *ijma'* and *qiyas* as sources of Islamic law could better be understood through close relationship between science and religion. It is eas

give a verdict on certain drugs from Islamic perspective when such drugs are intoxicating or produce dullness or lethargy than cigarette which side-effects could not be easily determined, as it kills gradually. The establishment of the side-effects of tobacco through scientific studies and its association with the development of cancers in many organs of the body and other diseases ascribed to it now gives Muslim jurists the knowledge of giving a ruling on the stand of Islam on such a substance as tobacco.

From all indications, it has been proved beyond any reasonable doubt that cigarette smoking is dangerous to human health, of not only the smokers but also the passive smokers. In this wise, the wisdom of the Almighty Allah in forbidding all what is evil (Qur'an 7: 157) is apposite here; since it has been proved scientifically that cigarette smoking is an evil and dangerous to health. Thus, man should avoid what is harmful to his health as the Qur'an forbids anything that can lead one to destruction when it says:

"And spend of your substance in the cause of Allah. And make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction... (Qur'an 2; 195)".

It should be noted that consumption of anything which can cause one's death either quickly or gradually is *haram* in Islam, as a Muslim's life, health and wealth are trusts which he is supposed to utilize judiciously. He has no right to terminate his life. The Holy Qur'an says:

"And do not kill or destroy yourselves, for verily Allah is ever merciful to you (Qur'an 4:29)".

The fact that cigarette smoking is prohibited in public places, mosques and other sacred places, is enough reason that it must be totally abstained from. That cigarette smoking is popular in places like film houses, amusement park and other vice-ridden places is another reason to inform smokers that they are smoking what is not acceptable in the community.

Some Muslims believe that tobacco smoking is only abhorred (*makruh*) but not forbidden (*haram*) in Islam. Such a Muslim should realize that even if it is *makruh* we are not expected to move near it, as the difference between *haram* and *makruh* is narrow. The Holy Prophet (S.A.W) comments on this:

*"That which is lawful is plain and that which unlawful) is plain, and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which not many people know (whether they are halal or haram). Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honour. But he who falls into doubtful matters falls into that which is unlawful..."*¹⁹

Apart from the above, cigarette smoking is wasteful; it has no real benefit. *Khamr* (an alcoholic drink), which the Qur'an says it has some benefits, is declared *haram* because its disadvantages are more than its advantages; talk less of tobacco, which has no benefit at all. It can neither quench the thirst of a smoker nor satisfy his hunger. It has the same characteristics as the food of the people of hell-fire, which the Qur'an describes thus:

"No food will be there for them but a bitter dhari' which will neither nourish nor satisfy hunger" (Qur'an 88: 6-7)".

According to Yusuf Ali, *dhari'* is a plant, bitter and thorny, loathsome in smell and appearance, which will neither give fattening nourishment to the body nor in any way satisfy the burning pangs of hunger.²⁰ A similitude of such a food on earth is cigarette.

Wealth and money are gifts from Allah and to misuse or squander Allah's gifts is a sign of ingratitude to Him. On this note, Allah regards spendthrifts as brothers of Satan. Likewise those who spend their money on what can harm them (like cigarette) are not merely fools but brothers of Satan as well. Thus the Qur'an warns:

"...But squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of Satan and the Satan is to his Lord (Himself) ungrateful (Qur'an 17: 26-27)".

The odour from cigarette smoking is offensive to non-smokers and it can as well harm them. So smokers have unconsciously opted out of the fold of *Iman* as the prophet says, "whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbours."²¹ So, as the wife, children and neighbours of a smoker share

from harmful effects of smoking, it is a sort of inconvenience on them. To stay with a smoker is as dangerous as staying with a blacksmith in his workshop. This similitude is appropriately given by the Prophet when he says:

"A similitude of sitting in the company of the virtuous and evil ones is like sitting with someone who carries musk and someone in the workshop of a blacksmith respectively. As for the former, it is either he gives you, or you buy from him or at least you enjoy the fragrant odour. But as for the latter, it is either you get your cloth burnt, or you smell offensive odour or you get catarrh".²²

Furthermore, Sheikh Mohammed Al-'Aini, one of the Hanafi jurists and theologians prohibited smoking on the basis of its being narcotic, the use of which is forbidden by Islamic Law, and anything that is intoxicating and induces fatigue and apathy is declared *haram* by the Prophet.²³ He says: 'every intoxicant is *khamr* and every *khamr* is *haram*'. One may try to say that smoking is not intoxicant except when taken in excess, but this is not so, as even if any food is taken in excess, it becomes *haram*. Thus the prophet says: 'of that which intoxicates in a large amount, a small amount is equally *haram*'.²⁴ He says further: 'if a bucketful intoxicates, a sip of it is *haram*'.²⁵

To say that tobacco or cigarette is not mentioned in the Holy Qur'an is a misconception. The Holy Qur'an is comprehensive and encyclopedic; it leaves nothing untouched. To be looking for the word 'tobacco' or 'cigarette' in the Qur'an before one abstains from it, is like insisting that unless one sees it in the Qur'an that Gammalin 20 or any other poisonous chemicals is harmful, one would not abstain from it. As Almighty Allah has forbidden anything evil, tobacco is included.²⁶ It is then left for those who are addicted to it, to desist from it. If a Muslim is capable of abstaining from food, drink and sexual intercourse during the days of Ramadan, why should he not forgo smoking which can neither quench his thirst nor satisfy his hunger. Smokers must not wait till they become victims of its evil effects before they are forced to leave it. They should not be deceived that those who smoke are healthy and have not been adversely affected by it. If at all they have not been affected physically, it has affected their personality, their

neighbours and their wealth. There is no doubt that one will have to beware of someone who steals one's money a day, how much more of cigarette which is another 'thief' that steals smoker's money every day. The physical side effects of cigarette may not necessarily be felt instantly on the smoker but his teeth which are darkened by it, coupled with the offensive odour, which people try to avoid from him, are enough for him to forgo cigarette smoking.

SUGGESTIONS

As it has been confirmed that tobacco smoking is injurious to health, we must do everything possible to get rid of it in our society. To do this, the following suggestions need to be considered:

- (a) Further planting of tobacco plant and proliferation of tobacco companies in the country must be curtailed.
- (b) Advertisement of cigarette both in the electronic and print media should stop henceforth. Advertising such amounts to painting it white, to make it attractive even to those who have not been taking it.
- (c) Passive smokers must be encouraged to take legal action against smokers who try to infringe on their health rights through their smoking habits.

It is hoped that if the above steps are taken, they would help in no small measure in checking the menace of cigarette smoking in our society.

CONCLUSION

Islam allows everything that is beneficial to mankind and forbids everything that is harmful. The soul, brain, wealth, religion, and honour of a Muslim are considered sacred to him and any of these can be soiled if he is addicted to smoking. This is why the prophet says that everyman will be called to account for how he has used his age, his knowledge and his wealth, how he acquired and disposed it, his body, how he has used or safeguarded it.

One doubts the sincerity of the government in its efforts at promoting public health through its various programmes like immunization and primary health delivery services, if it cannot nip the problem of tobacco smoking on the bud. Despite the government's ban on smoking of cigarette in public places, one

doubts if someone has ever been arrested or convicted for committing the offence. The non-challant attitude of the government on cigarette smoking is responsible for the rigidity and persistence of smokers who despite the instructions boldly written on the packets of cigarette that 'smokers are liable to die young', still remain adamant in smoking. If there is a penalty for a culprit who attempts to terminate his life, one wonders why such a penalty should not be meted on smokers as well.

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