

Editorial

Tobacco control policy in Indonesia

In this issue, there is a very interesting article concerning smoking cessation program in our neighboring country, Malaysia.¹

This program and tobacco control policy is highly relevant to be applied in our country, as since 1970, there has been a sharp increase in tobacco consumption in Indonesia, and between 2001 and 2004, there was a 9.2 percent increase in per capita tobacco consumption. Recently sixty three percent of Indonesian men smoke, and overall smoking prevalence is 34 percent, which causes a number of 97 million non smokers to be passive smokers due to exposure to secondhand smoke.²

Moreover, Indonesia is the only Asia Pacific country that until recently has not signed and agreed to the ratification of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).³ The FCTC comprehensively prohibit cigarette promotion, advertising and sponsorship, while Indonesian Government does not prohibit cigarette advertising, though Indonesian Broadcasting Law Article 46 Clause 3b prohibits promotion of addictive substances, and tobacco is included in addictive substances in the Indonesian Health Law Article 113 Clause 3.⁴

The reasons for not signing the international convention on tobacco control are supposed to be due to the fear of economic loss due to the myth of the importance of tobacco in Indonesian economy. The tobacco industry and workforces that are involved in tobacco manufacturing and selling argue against tobacco control policy by stating that the policy will cause massive unemployment, and cause economic crisis, as many parties are involved, such as the 2.4 million tobacco farmers, 1.5 million clove farmers, 400,000 people in the cigarette industry, 4.8 million in the retail levels, and another 1 million workers in related industries, which was noted in 2008.^{5,6}

In fact, tobacco farming is seasonal, and when fulltime equivalent is calculated, it provides less than half million full time workers that is only less than 1% of fulltime employment in agricultural sector. In industrial sector, tobacco manufacturing only takes 1.2% of the total industrial sector workforce, and mostly consists of women who are paid only 2/3rds of the average wages.⁵

Another myth is that tobacco control will reduce tax, and thus Government revenue, as cigarette taxes was Rp.57 trillion (\$5.75 billion) in 2008.^{5,6} However, the fact

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showed that there was a \$97 million deficit from tobacco import-export activity in 2007. Overall industrial gain from tobacco is only Rp.13 trillion, while loss due to impaired health is Rp.42 trillion. Moreover, a study by the University of Indonesia's Demographic Institute and world bank on tobacco economics showed that in low income households, the expenditure on tobacco was the second highest or Rp.117,624 per month that was 12.4% of the whole income. This fact causes neglect in nutrient intake and education, which further contributes to poverty chain.⁴

Meanwhile, the disadvantages of tobacco industry are more prominent. A study by the University of Indonesia's Demographic Institute in 2008 revealed that in Indonesia 427,948 people died due to smoking-related illnesses and this accounted to 22.5 percent of death in the whole country. Moreover, cigarette is known to cause various health problems and shorten life expectancy.⁶ According to the WHO, every six seconds one died due to smoking, and smoking is the cause of death that showed the fastest increase compared to other causes.⁴

As tobacco farming and industry cause more harm than benefit, many organizations such as the Indonesian Tobacco Control Network (ITCN), the National Commission for Children's Protection (NCCP), the National Commission on Tobacco Control (NCTC), the Indonesian Forum of Parliamentarians for Population and Development (IFPPD), and the Indonesian Consumers Association (YLKI) urge the creation and implementation of health law and broadcasting law with tobacco control clause.^{6,7}

Efforts from anti-smoking activists begin to harvest results as the tobacco clause that has been deleted was inserted back into the Health Law.^{4,7} Further, Indonesian muslim council declared a religious ban (fatwa) against smoking for children, teenagers and pregnant women, and smoking in public area.⁸ However, efforts to insert and implement tobacco control clause in Broadcasting Law is still underway.

Implementation of tobacco control clause in Broadcasting Law is of great importance, as tobacco advertising may increase the prevalence of smoking in children and teenagers, and the more young they begin to smoke, the more difficult to stop, as a slogan of a multinational tobacco industry: smoking teenagers of today is our prospective customers of tomorrow.⁴

Another achievement is the Gubernatorial Decree of the year 2005 that bans smoking in public areas, though it has not been treated seriously, and the implementations are still not effective. Therefore a new and more specific Gubernatorial Decree No. 88 of 2010 has been issued

and therefore is supposed to be implemented more easily. However, the by law to enforce the decree is not yet issued, as it is supposed to be issued in early 2011.⁹

In conclusion, many efforts are still needed for tobacco control, and it is still a long way before we can be free from the harms of tobacco smoke.

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