

13 DEC, 2019

Cheap illegal cigarettes are a threat to minors



The Sun, Malaysia

Cheap illegal cigarettes are a threat to minors

➤ Easy availability undermining anti-smoking efforts



Malaysians buy 1,000 sticks of illegal cigarettes every minute, according to a study by Oxford Economics, *The Economics of the Illicit Tobacco Trade in Malaysia*.

KUALA LUMPUR: An overwhelming majority of Malaysians (93%) believe that the increased availability of cheap illegal cigarettes in Malaysia is a threat to the health of children, especially minors under the age of 18.

In addition, 49% of young adults between the age of 19 and 29 have said it is easier to get illegal cigarettes today compared with five years ago, while 29% said it was about the same in terms of accessibility to illegal cigarettes.

These findings came from the Malaysian Perception of Smoking and Vaping Survey, a recent opinion poll conducted by Green Zebras, a leading market research company in Malaysia.

Looking into concerns surrounding the rise in underage smoking, the poll also found that eight in 10 Malaysians concur that the easy access to cheap illegal cigarettes is undermining efforts to reduce the overall smoking rate.

Most parents (79%), teachers (87%) and healthcare professionals (84%) likewise agreed that cheap illegal cigarettes are counter-productive to the national health agenda aimed at getting citizens to quit smoking.

This perception is supported by a separate survey done in 2016 by the Institute for Public Health and the Ministry of Health that discovered an astounding 78.7% of the respondents tried their first cigarette before they turned 14.

"Naturally, Malaysians are deeply concerned about underage smoking and they are well aware that a primary cause of this problem is the easy availability of cheap illegal cigarettes," Green Zebras Sdn Bhd managing director and co-founder Steve Murphy said.

"Surprisingly, our survey also found that half or 50% of non-smokers polled have indicated that it is easier to get their hands on cheap illegal cigarettes today compared with five years ago. If non-smokers know where to get illegal cigarettes, what about curious underage schoolchildren?"

Murphy pointed out that the illegal cigarettes problem in Malaysia is more than just about the economics of lost taxes.

Our survey shows that Malaysians also clearly understand its far-reaching negative impact on underage smoking, the national health agenda and other social ills, including fostering corruption and criminal activities, he said.

"However, beyond just putting two and two together - what else can be done to prevent Malaysian youth from accessing cheap illegal cigarettes?" he asked.

A recent study by Oxford Economics, *The Economics of the Illicit Tobacco Trade in Malaysia*, found Malaysians buy 1,000 sticks of illegal cigarettes every minute.

More worryingly, the study found that illegal cigarettes cost only about RM4.50 a pack compared with legal cigarettes that cost around RM15 per pack.

Green Zebras' Malaysian Perception on Smoking and Vaping Survey had a sample size of 1,010 Malaysian adults and is reflective of the perception of all Malaysian adults across Peninsular Malaysia.

Cheap Illegal Cigarettes Drive Underage Smoking

Underage smoking is a significant cause of concern to Malaysians. Worryingly, this issue is linked to the growing prevalence of cheap illegal cigarettes in Malaysia.

In this instalment of the Green Zebras *Malaysian Perception on Smoking and Vaping Survey*, we asked Malaysians their thoughts on this issue.

BARRIER TO REDUCE SMOKING

78% Malaysians believe cheap illegal cigarettes are a barrier to reducing overall smoking rate

AGAINST NATIONAL HEALTH AGENDA

79%
Parents

84%
Healthcare professionals

87% Teachers agree that cheap illegal cigarettes contradict national health agenda

CHEAP ILLEGAL CIGARETTES POSE HEALTH RISK TO YOUTH (BELOW 18)

Source: Green Zebras Sdn Bhd

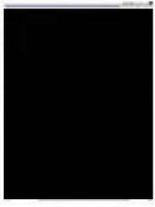
CHEAP ILLEGAL CIGARETTES ARE A THREAT TO YOUTH

AGREE

9/10

Malaysians believe that the increased availability of cheap illegal cigarettes is a threat to health of children (below 18)

Green Zebras
A market research company of a different stripe



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SUMMARIES

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