

Work for a Better Bangladesh - PATH Canada

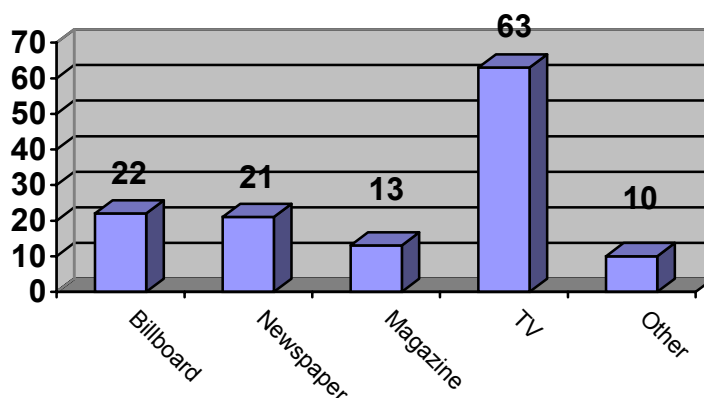
Cigarette Ads: Are Our Children a Target?

Are children aware of cigarette ads? Or since the tobacco companies say they aim their ads only at adults, are children mostly unaware of their existence and uninfluenced by their attractive messages?

In order to measure the exposure of children in Bangladesh to cigarette ads, Work for a Better Bangladesh and PATH Canada recently carried out a survey throughout Bangladesh of 897 children—531 boys and 366 girls. The children ranged in age from 5 to 13, with most being between ages 6 and 11. Most (77%) of the children said they had a TV at home.

The children reported seeing cigarette ads on various media, particularly TV (63% of all children). Smaller percentages of children reported seeing other advertising, but 21% reported seeing cigarette ads in the newspaper. Since young children obviously do not read the newspaper, it is clear that the papers serve as a source of exposure to advertising, not information.

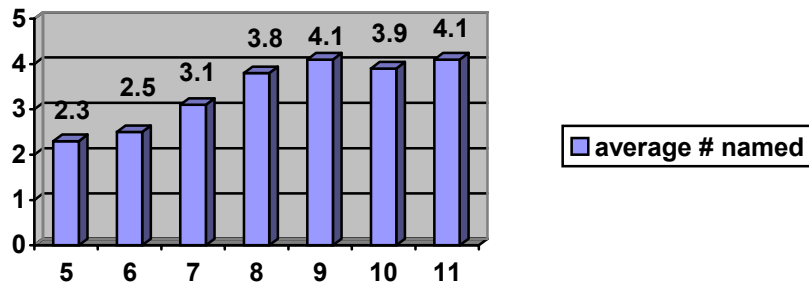
Percent of 5- to 13-year-old children exposed to cigarette ads, by media



Children were asked to name all cigarette brands they know. On average, children could name over 3 different brands. Only 10% of the children were not able to name any brands; a full 65% named John Players Gold Leaf. As ages increased, so did the number of cigarette brands mentioned, with 5-year-olds on average mentioning 2.3 brands, but 9- and 11-year-olds mentioning over four different brands. While 38% of 5-year-olds could name no brands, only 3% of 11-year-olds could name none.

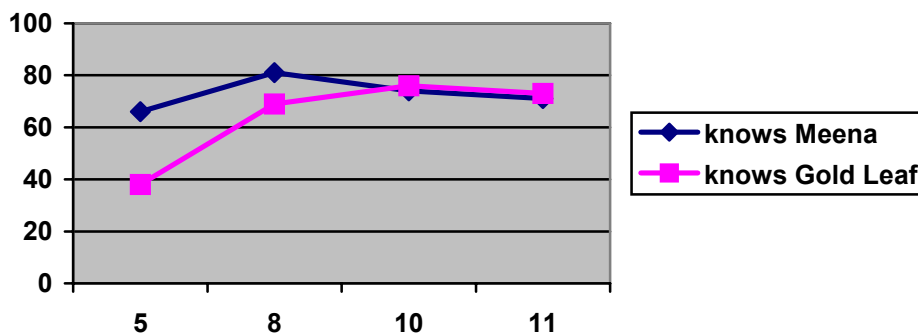
Given that virtually no children in this age group are likely to be smokers, their familiarity with cigarette brand names is disturbing. By comparison, children on average could name only 1.8 brands of toothpaste.

Average number of cigarette brands named, by age



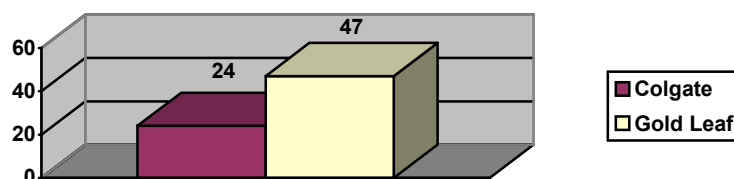
Children were also asked what is Meena (a very popular cartoon throughout South Asia), as well as what is John Players Gold Leaf. As the following graph shows, by age 10, knowledge of Gold Leaf cigarettes had matched knowledge of the children’s cartoon, with 74% of children knowing that Meena is a cartoon, and 76% knowing that Gold Leaf is a cigarette brand. That in such young children, knowledge of a cigarette brand would be as high as that of the most popular cartoon is astonishing.

Percent knowing Meena vs. Gold Leaf



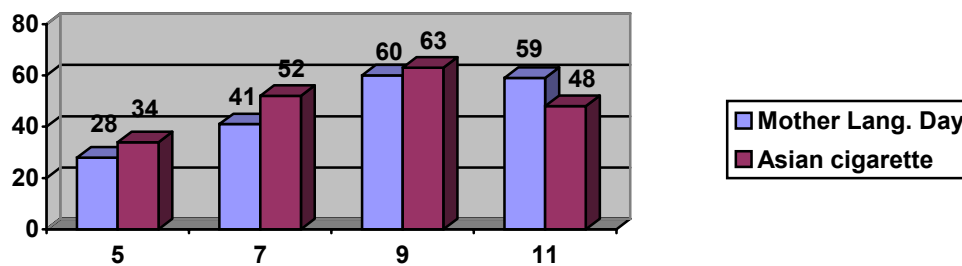
When asked to name brands of cigarettes and of toothpaste, across the ages, more children mentioned Gold Leaf than Colgate. Among 6-year-olds, only 24% named Colgate, while 47% mentioned Gold Leaf.

Brand awareness among 6-year-olds of Colgate vs. Gold Leaf cigarettes



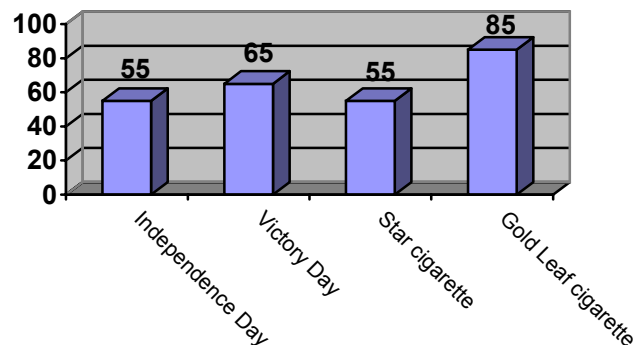
One of Bangladesh's major holidays is Mother Language Day, which originated in Bangladesh and is now celebrated around the world on 21st February. On average, 52% of children know that 21 February is Mother Language Day, while 85% know that Gold Leaf is a cigarette. While fewer children know Asian than Gold Leaf, it was not till children reached 11 years of age that they were more aware of this significant date than of the fact that Asian is a brand of cigarettes. Among 7-year-olds, only 41% knew what 21 February is, whereas 52% knew that Asian is a brand of cigarettes. This is particularly shocking, given the significance of the language movement in Bangladesh to retain Bengali as the national language, and the great festivities that occur each year on that date.

Knowledge of Mother Language Day vs. Asian cigarettes by age



Knowledge of other major national holidays fares little better than for Mother Language Day. Across ages, only 55% of children know that 26 March is Independence Day, and 65% know that 16 December is Victory Day. By comparison, 55% of children know that Star, and 85% that Gold Leaf, is a cigarette. One must question what is happening to children, that they are more aware of cigarette brands than of national holidays.

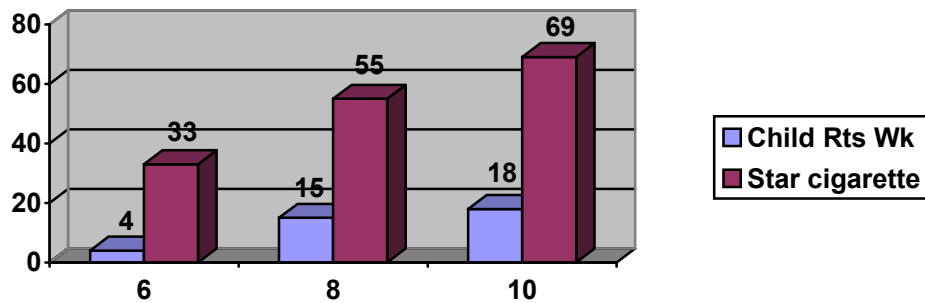
Knowledge of National Holidays and cigarettes



It is perhaps not surprising that few children are aware that Children's Rights Week exists, much less recognize the date. But it is still disturbing that so few children—a mere 13% across age groups—are aware of their Rights Week, versus recognition of a fairly minor cigarette brand.

Across the age groups, the differences are striking, with 4% of 6-year-olds knowing of Children's Rights Week vs. 33% knowing Star cigarettes; the figures are 15% and 55% for 8-year-olds, and 18% and 69% for 10-year-olds. One must again question society's priorities, that a cigarette brand is so much better known than a week set aside to honor the rights of children.

Knowledge of Children's Rights Week vs. Star cigarettes



This survey leaves no doubt that children are very much exposed to cigarette advertising, and highly aware of cigarette brand names. It is time to reflect on what we want our children to know, and not know. In order to protect our children from the harmful effect of cigarette advertising, and to reduce the chance of their becoming addicted to this deadly product, we must act now to ban all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship.

Tobacco companies claim that they want only adults to see their ads. How true is this? Their internal documents tell another story – indicating that youth are a specific target of their ads. In addition, the ubiquitous nature of tobacco ads means that it is impossible for children not to be exposed to them. The only way to protect children completely from tobacco advertising is to eliminate it entirely. Not only will this protect children from the influence of tobacco ads, but it will help adults to quit smoking. After all, tobacco harms those of all ages – and we must protect everyone from its influence.

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