

# DAWN

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## Youth getting hooked up on *Sheesha*

By Sher Baz Khan

ISLAMABAD, Sept 6: Thousands of youngsters in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad have fallen into the habit of *Sheesha* (hookah) smoking which is available in commercial and residential areas in blatant violation of the anti-smoking laws.

The trend is spreading across the country as *Sheesha* is now being considered a status symbol. With unchecked promotion and unethical marketing, it is easily available in restaurants, hotels and food streets in almost all the big cities of the country.

A field survey conducted by the Network for Consumer Protection and released here on Wednesday revealed that restaurants and bars were openly offering this tobacco product as a recreational group activity in blatant violations of the 'Prohibition of smoking in enclosed places and protection of non-smokers health ordinance 2002'.

It was found that 50 per cent of big hotels and restaurants in Rawalpindi and

Islamabad offer *Sheesha*. Youngsters below the age of 18 are found attracted to these bars and restaurants in many cases with semi-dark rooms, light music and Arabic dance on big TV screens.

The survey observed that *Sheesha* was being propagated successfully as a non-tobacco product in violations of the ethics of advertisements. While the fact is that the paste, the smoke of which is inhaled, contains tobacco and molasses along with some fruit flavours.

A *Sheesha* smoking session normally culminates in an hour. And on average an individual takes 200 puffs that is as much harmful as smoking eight cigarettes.

"It seems that the players who have vested interests in spreading tobacco have diverted their attention towards the promotion of *Sheesha* realising the growing awareness among the masses of other tobacco products like cigarettes, chewing tobacco, etc., " it

said.

*Sheesha* is also becoming an essential drawing room piece for upper class as a part of modern lifestyle. The hookah and paste are available in departmental stores and even in medical stores.

The unchecked outdoor advertisements of *Sheesha* bars and restaurants in the form of billboards and posters also play a vital role in attracting more and more people to this activity.

According to the prohibition of smoking in enclosed places and protection of non-smokers health ordinance, smoking is not allowed at enclosed public places including hotels and restaurants but the implementation of the law in the context of *Sheesha* smoking is invisible.

*Sheesha* is available even at food streets. According to the section 8 of the same law, "no person shall sell cigarettes or any other such smoking substance to anyone below the age of 18."