

**MEANINGS OF SMOKING AMONG RURAL MALE
ADOLESCENT SMOKERS IN MUNSHIPARA VILLAGE OF
BANGLADESH**



MD. NURUL HAQUE

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MD. NURUL HAQUE 5238076 SHHS/M

M.A. (HEALTH SOCIAL SCINCE)

THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE: SAUWAKON RATANAWIJITRASIN, Ph.D., LUECHAI SRINGERNYUANG, Ph.D., SUREE KANJANAWONG, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to explore meanings of smoking among rural male adolescents. It focused on how family, social and cultural (especially religious) attitudes, beliefs, and practices shape the meanings of smoking, and how context and meanings affect patterns of smoking.

This was a qualitative research study conducted by in-depth interviews of eight informants, male adolescent smokers (15-19 years old). Non-participant observation was made of the informants and of their daily lives and activities, and of other people of the village closely related to them, such as peers, parents, local leaders, shopkeepers who sell cigarettes and owners of tea stalls where the adolescents usually meet one another to gossip and smoke. Interpretive social science perspective, especially symbolic interactionism, provided the theoretical basis of this research.

The results of this research reveal that interaction of adolescents with family members and peers, and social attitudes and practices give meaning to smoking as a symbol of adulthood, masculinity, independence, smartness, pleasure, remedy for tension, and anxiety. Culturally, smoking or offers to smoke with another person act as a symbol of friendship, kinship, courtesy, politeness, modesty, enjoyment, and entertainment. On the other hand, Islamic religious beliefs and practices regarding holy places (e.g., mosques), holy persons (e.g., imams), the holy month (the fasting month of Ramadan), and holy practices (e.g. Tablig, *literally* preaching, *in practice* – leaving one's village and living in mosques of other areas for a specific period to learn and preach basic Islamic beliefs and practices) are not compatible with smoking and have an influence on the prevention and cessation of smoking. In all cases, context and meanings directly affect the pattern of smoking by adolescents.

Everyday social interactions play an important role in shaping meanings of smoking among rural male adolescents. Meanings, in turn, affect patterns of smoking. This finding should guide planning of anti-smoking measures, including health education.

KEY WORDS: MEANING / SMOKING / RURAL ADOLESCENT / RELIGION / BANGLADESH.

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