

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING BETEL  
QUID CHEWING AMONG YOUNG ADULT MYANMAR MEN IN  
CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS OF MANDALAY CITY,  
MYANMAR**



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**ABSTRACT**

Betel quid chewing is the most common form of smokeless tobacco (SLT) use in Myanmar. Although the association between betel quid and oral cancer has been strongly documented, and has given rise to the health burden, its consumption is still prevalent, particularly among young adult men. This study was conducted from multiple perspectives to uncover the social and cultural factors influencing the popularity of betel quid chewing among young adult Myanmar men in contemporary society of Mandalay, Myanmar.

The study was conducted from July – December 2013 using qualitative methods. It included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and non-participant observations.

Indefinite designation and weak application of the current tobacco control laws created an enabling betel chewer structure. Poor socioeconomic conditions and youth life styles exposed young men to the betel chewer community. The wide spread cultural belief that betel chewing is less dangerous than tobacco smoking, and perceived convenience that fits with working conditions gave strength to young men's perceptions, beliefs and decision making to experiment with it. Gender ideology about manhood, involving risk taking, challenging authority, and power competency as proof of masculinity, has a strong influence on young men's decisions in both initiation and affirmation towards betel quid chewing. Participants were aware of the socioeconomic impacts and health risks resulting from betel quid chewing. However, the prevailing environment and lack of social support from friends were major factors that caused ex-betel chewers to re-engage.

There is a need to reform current tobacco control policies with a clear designation of SLT control component; an adoption of a gender based culturally sensitive smokeless tobacco control program; development of a health education program emphasizing poor health outcomes and betel quid chewing addiction; and provide simultaneous implementation of SLT controls and a poverty alleviation program with a strong implication for policy and extend health education coverage, for both school and out of school young men.

**KEY WORDS: SOCIOCULTURAL MEANINGS / BETEL CHEWING PRACTICE AND  
EXPERIENCES/ YOUNG ADULT MEN/MYANMAR**

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