Seeing Beneath the Surface: The Truth About the Tobacco Industry’s Youth Smoking Prevention Programmes

Tobacco Free Initiative

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION WESTERN PACIFIC REGION
Introduction

Most governments, Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) and tobacco control advocates in the Western Pacific Region have meagre budgets to develop, implement and sustain their tobacco control programmes. The tobacco industry has apparently seized upon this vulnerability in attempts to promote themselves as “responsible corporate citizens” while they continue to thwart real progress in reducing tobacco consumption.

Industry documents reveal that British American Tobacco (BAT), Japan Tobacco International (JTI), Philip Morris (PM) and their local subsidiaries have offered money, expert consultants and support services to governments and civic organizations in drafting tobacco control legislation and carrying out educational and advocacy projects purportedly to help prevent young people from using their products. The industry is aggressively promoting their “Youth Smoking Prevention” programmes within the Western Pacific Region.
Are these offers for real or are they too good to be true?

Japan
1999 – the Tobacco Institute of Japan launched a nationwide retailer support programme to “enhance tobacco retail outlets’ compliance with the country’s existing minimum age law.”

Philippines
1999 – Philip Morris provides funds for the “I Am Strong” programme, officially endorsed by the Secretary of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports. University of Asia and the Pacific also received PM support to train teachers for this programme.

2001 – Philippine JAYCEES and Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Body) partner with Philip Morris for a youth smoking prevention programme.

2002 – Japan Tobacco announces a smoking prevention ad campaign, aired in the Philippines and 132 other Asian countries on MTV channels, with the catch phrase “Youth should not smoke”.

Papua New Guinea
2001 – BAT launched an education campaign programme in Port Moresby to persuade children and young people not to smoke.

Australia
2000 – “I’ve got the Power” programme
1999 – “18 + It’s the Law” retail access programme developed for supermarket chains and for the Australian Convenience Stores Association by Philip Morris.

“No one should welcome the tobacco industry’s youth anti-smoking campaigns, a cynical attempt to make smoking seem more grown-up and even more appealing to youth.”
Tobacco Free Kids
Action on Smoking and Health, UK. 2001
What They Say, What They Mean and What the Evidence Shows

The tobacco industry multinationals claim they do not want young people to smoke:

BAT: “Ensure that only adults smoke.”

JTI: “No one wants minors to smoke. Neither does Japan Tobacco. Smoking is an adult choice. When we say that, we mean it.”

PM: “Every decent minded person agrees that it is wrong for minors to smoke. Smoking is an adult choice…”

But the internal tobacco documents say otherwise:

“(Brown and Williamson) (the US subsidiary of BAT) will not support a youth smoking prevention programme which discourages young people from smoking.”

Tobacco Institute, 1983

And the evidence indicates:

A major motivation for teen smoking is the aspiration to adulthood… The positioning of tobacco as ‘adult’ and ‘forbidden’ is, therefore, a thinly concealed pitch to aspirational and rebellious youth. Danger! Public Relations (PR) in the Playground, ASH, 2001.

What they say:

The tobacco multinationals’ smoking prevention programmes emphasize limiting youth access to tobacco through the use of retailer schemes, identification cards and laws to increase the age limits for tobacco sales. “Philip Morris International actively supports laws worldwide that establish a minimum age of at least 18 for the lawful sale of tobacco products.” PM, 1999

What they really intend:

“If we can frame proactive legislation or other kinds of action on the youth access issue… we will be protecting our industry for decades to come.” PM, 1995

What the evidence shows:

Point-of-sale restrictions may have contributed to increases in non-commercial acquisition…. Legislation designed to prevent adolescents from purchasing cigarettes is an insufficient strategy for reducing adolescent smoking, as there are several other easily available sources of cigarettes for adolescents. Castrucci BC, et al; Journal of Adolescent Health, 2002

What they say:

“Lastly, we discussed the issue of taxation for tobacco products. While we recognize and respect the rights of governments to determine tax rates for consumer products, we wish to inform you…of the possible adverse consequences of drastic increases in tobacco taxes…(that) would not only defeat the purpose of the tax increase but could also undermine the work of the government on tobacco regulation and youth smoking prevention.” PM, 2002

What they really acknowledge:

“The 1982-83 round of price increases caused two million adults to quit smoking and prevented 600,000 teenagers from starting to smoke…. we were hit disproportionately hard. We don’t need to have that happen again.” PM, 1987

What the evidence from the World Bank (WB) shows:

“… the most effective way to deter children from taking up smoking is to increase taxes on tobacco.” WB, 1999
### Industry sponsored youth smoking prevention programmes distract us from the interventions that work:

#### WHAT WORKS:

- The evidence is clear – a comprehensive and integrated approach to tobacco control is necessary, with the following interventions all playing a role:
  - Increasing tobacco prices through taxes and other means
  - Banning all forms of tobacco advertising and promotions
  - Implementing smoke-free workplaces, public places, vehicles and homes
  - Educating youth on nicotine addiction and the risks of tobacco use
  - Addressing smoking cessation among all smokers, young and adult

#### WHAT DOESN’T WORK:

- Establishing youth prevention and education programmes as stand-alone interventions
- Laws, programmes and policies that focus only on preventing smoking by youth enacted in isolation from other evidence-based interventions of comprehensive tobacco control
- Telling young people they shouldn’t smoke because they’re not adults
- Using ID cards and signage to enforce age limits for the sales of cigarettes
- Interventions that do not address adult smoking
- Voluntary marketing restrictions by the tobacco industry

At the same time, they lead us to believe that their product is only harmful to young people.

“It seems to me our objective is…. a ‘media event’ which in itself promises a lot but produces little.”

(Tobacco Institute Vice President Franklin Dryden, 1979)
Is your programme effective?

A Quick Test

Does it clearly mention that youth smoking prevention interventions should be framed within a comprehensive tobacco control programme? Yes No

Does it support cigarette price increase through taxation? Yes No

Does it support total advertising bans? Yes No

Does it deal directly with nicotine addiction as a major cause for compelling people to continue smoking? Yes No

Does it talk about the risks associated with smoking? Yes No

If you answered “NO” to any of these, and …

then the “Youth Smoking Prevention” programme you are considering is likely to be ineffective. Rather than protecting youth from tobacco, it may actually encourage an increase in youth smoking.
Five Recommended Action Points

1. Know the evidence on what works and what doesn't work to protect young people from tobacco.

2. When individuals or groups offer to fund a “youth smoking prevention” programme, evaluate the programme elements against the evidence. Refuse all programmes that are based on weak and ineffective interventions.

3. Require all prospective donors to your tobacco control programmes to complete a legally binding disclosure form that identifies all possible links with the tobacco industry.

4. Turn down all offers of support, funding and/or expert assistance that require you to trade the more effective interventions (i.e. price increases, total ad bans) for less effective interventions (i.e. educational programmes, partial and/or voluntary ad bans).

5. Finally, the Tobacco Free Initiative in The Western Pacific Regional Office (TFI-WPRO) strongly urges all governments, NGOs, academic and health institutions and other entities to refuse all offers from the tobacco industry to provide funding support, assistance and/or expert consultations to help you design and implement a tobacco control programme.

“A hallmark of all (tobacco) industry-designed efforts is the absence of the most effective tools for combating youth tobacco use.”

Tobacco Free Kids, 2000
No sensible, ethical person will take money from drug dealers for a youth programme to prevent drug abuse. No one in their right mind would accept money from child pornographers to teach children about avoiding sexual harassment. So why should governments and private entities accept money from the tobacco industry to teach young people not to smoke?

TFI Western Pacific Regional Office 2002

The tobacco industry “should not be allowed to run youth smoking prevention programmes. No department or school should be fooled by the tobacco industry’s youth smoking prevention programmes.”

Glantz, SA, American Journal of Public Health (AJPHA), June 2002

“If the nations of the world cannot once and for all conclude that the tobacco industry should not be trusted, they will continue to suffer the disease, death and disability caused by the industry’s promotion of its products and its search for profit.”

Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids Action on Smoking and Health, 2002

The truth about the tobacco industry’s youth smoking prevention programmes: They don’t work.