

# Combating the silent shisha epidemic in Nigeria: The need for public health education

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## Dear Editor,

Shisha smoking is a way of smoking tobacco, sometimes mixed with fruit or molasses sugar, through the mouthpiece of a bowl hose or tube<sup>1</sup>. Although the practice of shisha smoking started in the Middle East, it has spread to several other parts of the world, including Nigeria<sup>2</sup>. In Nigeria, the prevalence rate of shisha smoking, especially among the youth, is rising, making it an issue of public health concern<sup>3</sup>. The rising prevalence of shisha smoking in Nigeria can be attributed to the increase in the openings of new shisha lounges/bars, subtle advertisement of shisha in public places, social acceptance of shisha smoking, peer influence, and public misconceptions about the safety profile of shisha use<sup>3,4</sup>.

In May 2015, the bill prohibiting tobacco smoking in public places in Nigeria – Tobacco Control Bill – was passed into law by the Federal Government of Nigeria<sup>3,5</sup>. Unfortunately, many public shisha smoking places have opened in major cities across Nigeria, even after the enactment of the Tobacco Control Law<sup>3</sup>. In a 2015 technical report by the World Health Organization (WHO) Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation (TobReg), it was reported that many countries, including Nigeria, lack specific policy regulating shisha smoking among their populace<sup>4,6</sup>.

It is also noteworthy that most of the existing public health education programmes on tobacco in Nigeria have focused only on cigarettes, with little to no attention on shisha. It is of concern that many shisha smokers in Nigeria lack adequate knowledge of the health risks associated with shisha smoking<sup>7</sup>.

In order to combat the shisha epidemic in Nigeria, shisha tobacco control law should be enacted. Enacting this law by the Federal Government of Nigeria is not enough to combat the epidemic of shisha use in Nigeria. To effectively reduce the rate of shisha tobacco smoking in Nigeria we recommend

the use of public health education interventions, which should be focused on positively changing people's attitude towards shisha, on how to resist peer pressure to smoke, and to cover the health and socioeconomic hazards associated with shisha use and aspects of making shisha smoking a socially unacceptable habit<sup>8</sup>.

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