

Work for a Better Bangladesh  
Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance  
PATH Canada

**British American Tobacco's  
Youth Smoking Prevention Campaign:  
What are its true objectives?**

**Research and Analysis**

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Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 2001

## I. Introduction

*“If any cigarette company told me not to smoke, I’d think it was some sort of slyness on their part.”*<sup>1</sup> --13-year-old male student

*“They make the cigarettes, then will tell us not to smoke them—isn’t there any other target for their mischief?”*  
--15-year-old male student

On 28 July 2001, British American Tobacco (BAT) launched its “Youth Smoking Prevention Campaign”. BAT’s messages consist of a 30-second television ad, three one-minute radio scripts, a billboard, and a sticker. BAT claims that it sees smoking as an adult choice, that those under age 18 should not smoke, and that BAT feels the responsibility to curtail/prevent youth smoking. BAT says parents, retailers, media and the government can all play their part to prevent youth smoking.<sup>2</sup>

Is BAT truly, as it claims, a responsible company seeking to address the problem of youth smoking? Or is the whole campaign in fact a clever public relations scheme in order to stop attempts at legislation and to deflect criticism from the manufacturers of the only consumer product in the world which, when used as intended, kills its user?

This report looks at tobacco company youth smoking prevention campaigns in general, that of BAT Bangladesh in particular, and information provided by formerly private industry documents. It includes information from a focus group, and a survey of 300 youth. Information about research is included in the Appendix. We hope it inspires you to resist similar programs in your own country. For more information on reacting to such programs, we suggest you also visit the website for Essential Action: [www.essentialaction.org/tobacco](http://www.essentialaction.org/tobacco)

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes from students are drawn from focus group and survey research conducted in Bangladesh in August 2001, and translated into English.

<sup>2</sup> BAT, *Be smart, a campaign for youth smoking prevention*, 2000.

## II. Why do tobacco companies run youth smoking prevention campaigns?<sup>3</sup>

*“Before doing any publicity to prevent smoking, the cigarette companies should stop manufacturing cigarettes.”*

--14-year-old male student

*“It doesn’t make sense for cigarette companies to discourage people from smoking.”*

--13-year-old male student

### A worldwide strategy

According to BAT’s materials,<sup>4</sup> Philip Morris (manufacturer of Marlboro), BAT and Japan Tobacco have promoted youth smoking prevention campaigns in almost 70 countries. Why such an interest among big tobacco companies to prevent youth from smoking?

The tobacco industry is facing increased regulation around the world. The World Health Organization is working with governments to negotiate an international treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, to regulate tobacco at the international level and strengthen individual countries’ laws. Many countries have passed laws that limit or ban advertising, make many public places smoke-free, and require large and strongly-worded warnings on cigarette packs. Such measures have been shown to reduce smoking in the general population and among youth. Measures such as tax increases and ad bans are particularly successful with youth, as youth are far more price sensitive, and far more susceptible to advertising, than adults.

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<sup>3</sup> This section draws heavily on one report: Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), *Danger! PR in the Playground: Tobacco industry initiatives on youth smoking*, 2000. [www.ash.org.uk](http://www.ash.org.uk)

<sup>4</sup> BAT, 2000.

According to the World Bank, “the impact of higher taxes is likely to be greatest on young people, who are more responsive to price rises than older people”.<sup>5</sup> That is, if the price of cigarettes goes up, far more youth than adults will give up the habit. In the United States, about 86% of youth smokers prefer the three most heavily-advertised brands, as opposed to about a third of adult smokers. Children aged 10-12 who approve of cigarette advertising are twice as likely to become smokers within a year as children who disapprove of it. Children as young as three recognize cigarette ads. It is children, not adults, who buy the most heavily advertised brands.<sup>6,7</sup>

If the tobacco industry were serious about reducing smoking among youth, they would support, or at least not oppose, such measures. In fact, transnational tobacco companies like BAT strongly oppose such laws. They wish to distract government and others from insisting on such legislation by promoting voluntary agreements instead.

A lawsuit in the United States forced tobacco companies to make available millions of internal documents. Those documents clearly show the intent of tobacco companies in designing youth programs. In those documents, we can see that the tobacco industry decided to start conducting youth campaigns to convince governments not to pass legislation; to reinforce the belief that peer pressure, not advertising, is the cause of youth smoking; and to seize the political center and force the anti-smokers to an extreme.

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<sup>5</sup> World Bank, *Curbing the Epidemic: Governments and the economics of tobacco control*, 1999. [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

<sup>6</sup> Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), *Danger! PR in the Playground: Tobacco industry initiatives on youth smoking*, 2000. [www.ash.org.uk](http://www.ash.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> UICC, *Tobacco Control Fact Sheet 1: The case for banning advertising and promotion of tobacco*. [www.uicc.org](http://www.uicc.org)

A 1991 Tobacco Institute memo clearly describes BAT’s current practice:

“In order to offset further erosion of the industry’s image in this area, and to avoid further legislative forays, the tobacco industry should take two actions: Clearly and visibly announce our position on teenage smoking to the public generally and to leaders of all youth-oriented organizations [and]...A program to depict cigarette smoking as one of many activities some people choose to do as adults.”<sup>8</sup>

A 1991 Asian Tobacco/BAT document is similarly straightforward about the objectives of a youth campaign:

“We need to ask ourselves whether as an industry we could be turning our declared belief that we have no interest in recruiting children and by that I mean sub-teenagers—to more practical account. Much of what we have done around the world has been desultory and patchy—and yet being seen to cooperate on this particular issue has many positive public relations and public affairs benefits; is often relatively inexpensive to mount, and usually very difficult for the opposition effectively to counter without appearing sour and over-critical.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), 2000.

The tobacco industry youth prevention campaigns have certain points in common:<sup>10</sup>

- Involvement of authority figures, such as parents, teachers, and government officials. These are precisely the figures against whom teenagers rebel when they smoke.
- Absence of figures that are popular among youth—the sorts of people that youth wish to emulate, such as race car drivers, rock stars, and cricket players.
- Reinforcement of the message that smoking is an adult activity—which is precisely why so many teenagers smoke. They perceive smoking as adult, and wish to be adult. Telling people not to smoke before they turn 18 gives children and youth an easy way to show that they are grown-up.
- Absence of any mention of why smoking is a problem: that it causes 25 different diseases, including cancer, heart disease, and respiratory problems; that it causes impotence in men; that it is addictive; that cigarette smoke contains 4000 different chemicals including 40 known carcinogens; that cigarette smoke causes disease in non-smokers; that one in every two or three long-term smokers will die from smoking-related causes.

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<sup>10</sup> Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), 2000.

#### Do tobacco companies target youth?

*“The younger smoker is of pre-eminent importance: significant in numbers, ‘lead in’ to prime market, starts brand preference patterning....”* (Brown & Williamson [BAT], 1974)<sup>11</sup>

*“The loss of younger adult males and teenagers is more important to the long term, drying up the supply of new smokers to replace the old. This is not a fixed loss to the industry; its importance increases with time.”* (RJ Reynolds, 1982)<sup>12</sup>

Is it possible to believe that tobacco companies are serious about discouraging youth from smoking? Most people begin smoking when they are below age 20; many when they are as young as 12. People start as an experiment, to feel like an adult, and then become addicted. People also choose their brand fairly early, then tend to stick to it for most of their life. Most adults have chosen their brand, and will not change it, no matter how much advertising there is for other brands. Teenagers, on the other hand, tend to smoke the cigarettes that are most heavily advertised. If a company can win over a teenager, they are likely to keep him or her for life. If companies do not recruit teenagers, they will eventually dwindle and die, as adult smokers will either quit smoking or die. Teenagers are the pool of replacement smokers, and if the tobacco companies don’t actively recruit them, they will not be able to stay in business, and certainly will not be able to have the sort of growth that they enjoy.<sup>13</sup>

Given the importance of youth smokers to tobacco companies, any effort on their part to convince youth *not* to smoke must be looked at with skepticism. Why would any company try to chase away its own customers, especially those customers who

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<sup>11</sup> Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), 2000.

are most vital to their survival? On the other hand, having the *appearance* of discouraging youth to smoke is an important contribution to business.

Aren't voluntary agreements enough?

*“Opportunities should be explored...so as to find non-tobacco products and other services which can be used to communicate the brand or house name, together with their essential visual identifiers... The principle is to ensure that tobacco lines can be effectively publicized when all direct forms of communication are denied.”*  
(BAT, 1979)<sup>14</sup>

*“The concerts are for the purpose of selling more Benson & Hedges cigarettes.”*  
--young male student

Tobacco companies say that voluntary agreements are sufficient; that no strong legislation to control tobacco is needed. But the companies also violate the laws that do exist, and look for loopholes when laws become stronger.

Although the BAT quote above is old, the words describe BAT's current behavior—the use of the “&.” symbol to signify Benson & Hedges (B&H) cigarettes, as well as the use of John Player and B&H signs and logos on shops, without mention of cigarettes. If BAT is already trying to ensure its advertising will continue following a possible ban, how can it be trusted to change its behavior voluntarily?

BAT and other tobacco companies claim that they have changed their behavior; that in the past, they may not have been forthcoming about the health effects of smoking, or about their efforts to advertise to children, but that all that has changed. Where is the evidence of change? BAT still does not fully acknowledge that smoking is addictive, and it denies altogether the incontrovertible evidence that cigarette smoke causes

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<sup>14</sup> UICC, *Tobacco Control Fact Sheet 1*.

disease in others. It denies, despite the abundant evidence, that it has been involved in smuggling of cigarettes—in Bangladesh as well as other countries.<sup>15</sup> It continues to oppose any meaningful legislation of tobacco, raising of taxes, and an effective global tobacco control treaty. And its ads continue to use the idols of youth: rock musicians, race car drivers, sailors of a yacht on a great adventure.

### III. Critique of BAT Bangladesh's Youth Smoking Prevention Campaign

*“If a cigarette company said not to smoke, I would be astonished, and would think that they have concerts and ads to promote cigarettes, yet are telling me not to smoke.”*

--14-year-old male student

General remarks

The BAT Bangladesh program is based on BAT's youth smoking prevention campaigns in other countries, and closely resembles the campaigns being conducted by other tobacco companies. BAT documents indicate that it is doing the campaign for the same reasons as the other companies—to delay legislation and to improve its public image.

BAT—in Bangladesh and elsewhere—claims that it sees smoking as an “informed choice made by adults only, who are in a position to balance the pleasures of smoking against the inherent risks”.<sup>16</sup> Let us analyze that phrase.

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<sup>15</sup> Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, *Illegal Pathways to Illegal Profits: The Big Cigarette Companies and International Smuggling*, 2001. [www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org)

<sup>16</sup> BAT, 2000.

“*Informed*” means that potential smokers have information that allows them to decide whether or not to smoke. From where are they to obtain that information? How are they to learn about “the inherent risks”? The only information BAT gives to smokers is the mandated government message, “Smoking is deleterious to health”. Is that information sufficient to make a decision? How is smoking deleterious? If people smoke light cigarettes, are they less likely to get sick? What if they smoke less than a pack a day? What sorts of diseases do smokers get? Can cigarette smoke harm others? Nowhere does BAT provide any of the more specific information that would be necessary to make a truly *informed* choice.

By “*adults*” BAT means people over the age of 18. How does one attempt to promote a product only to those over age 18? One could choose messages that are more popular among older adults than among teenagers: use of classical music, images of older smokers, avoidance of messages that have particular resonance with youth. One could regularly conduct research to see whether one’s advertisements are popular with teenagers, and then, rather than increasing use of those messages, one could stop using them. None of this is happening.

“*Choice*” implies free will. But the nicotine in cigarettes is extremely addictive, and evidence shows that cigarette companies manipulate the level of nicotine in cigarettes to ensure addiction is maintained. Nicotine is at least as addictive as heroin and cocaine, and at least as hard to give up. Do drug addicts “choose” to use drugs, or do they use them because their addiction compels them to? Is it really possible to talk about choice when discussing an extremely addictive substance? Even a BAT scientist admitted the truth:

*“It has been suggested that cigarette smoking is the most addictive drug. Certainly large numbers of people will continue to smoke because they can’t give it up. If they could they would do so. They can no longer be said to make an adult choice.”*  
(BAT, 1980)<sup>17</sup>

Focusing tobacco control activities exclusively on youth, and in isolation of effective measures, is a flawed approach. Beyond that, the ads that BAT is using in Bangladesh have many flaws of their own. The very nature of the ads is a problem, as it allows BAT to advertise its name on billboards, radio, and TV without a warning about the dangers of its products.

#### Focus group results

*“When you see golden color and an ‘&’ sign on a billboard, you understand that it’s Benson & Hedges.”*

--focus group participant

In order to gain some understanding of youth exposure to BAT cigarette ads, Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB) held a focus group and conducted a survey of 300 students in one boys’ school. The focus group had eight participants: two girls and six boys, all non-smokers aged 14-16. The participants said that they did not pay much attention to cigarette ads because they didn’t smoke, but revealed great knowledge of BAT and other cigarette advertising. For instance, the participants all recognized the “&” as a Benson & Hedges symbol. They could recall the slogans on various billboards, and one gave an explanation of an image of torn pants on a clothesline that has the slogan “One & Only”: “There is one pair of pants, and there’s one brand of cigarettes.” They said that rock concerts are mostly viewed by teenagers and those in their twenties, and were aware of the current Star Search program sponsored by Benson & Hedges.

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<sup>17</sup> Action on Smoking and Health (London), *Tobacco Explained, The truth about the tobacco industry in its own words*, 1998. [www.ash.org.uk](http://www.ash.org.uk)

They also described BAT cigarette ads as quite attractive, and said that some children watch TV for the sake of seeing the ads, not the programs, and are exposed to a lot of cigarette ads in the process. Finally, they said many of the cigarette ads send the message that smoking involves heroism and bravery.

Results of the questionnaire, focusing on young teenagers' exposure to BAT ads, appear in the next section.

#### BAT Bangladesh's youth smoking prevention campaign

*"If cigarette companies said not to smoke, I'd be really upset. Because they're producing life-destroying products, then saying they're forbidden."*

--13-year-old male student

Are BAT's youth smoking prevention ads designed to appeal to youth? What are the messages? Researchers showed the BAT youth smoking prevention TV and radio ads and the billboard design/sticker to the focus group participants, in order to understand how youth might react to BAT's campaign.

Some of the focus group participants were familiar with the BAT youth smoking prevention campaign. They criticized the basis of the campaign, saying that smoking is harmful for everyone, not just those under age 18. They said that making something forbidden increases its appeal for youth. As for survey participants, many of the students had angry remarks about BAT conducting a prevention campaign among youth. The contradiction was obvious to many of a company simultaneously promoting a product, and telling part of its audience not to consume it. They said they would be astonished if a cigarette company told youth not to smoke, given all the effort they make through advertising, especially rock concerts, to attract young smokers. They said if they were serious about young people not smoking, they should get out of the business altogether.

#### **Sticker/billboard**

*"This sticker is no good. When you first look at it, you can't understand it. It could be an ad for Dano [powdered milk]."*

--focus group participant

The same image is used on the sticker and billboard. To the left is the word "no" with an attractive picture of smoke rings (learning to blow smoke rings may be one of the incentives to smoke). "No" resonates with parental authority—teachers, parents, and other adults telling teenagers what they shouldn't do. To the right is the alternative: "We don't smoke." The bland message is accompanied by a suitably bland picture of six youths—four boys and two girls. One of the boys is holding his hat in the air, and one of the girls is holding up flowers; the boys are about to clasp hands. The boys are skinny and have no particular appeal. The background is white. The sterile image of the young non-smokers is in stark contrast to the more attractive, dreamy picture of smoke rings, and to the very attractive and sophisticated B&H and John Player Gold Leaf billboards and newspaper ads.

Some focus group participants said that the image used on the sticker and billboard is unattractive; others found it attractive but said it doesn't make sense, and would require concentration to understand what the message is. They said B&H ads, with their dreamy sunset backgrounds, are far more attractive than the youth prevention image.

#### **Radio scripts**

There are three one-minute radio scripts.

##### *For working children*

A young boy's boss asks him if he smokes. The boy hesitates, then admits he does: "I really want to be like the grown ups". The boss replies, "...the more you learn, the more you will become an expert! No need to smoke. Understood?" The boy agrees. The voice-over states, "Everybody should come forward to prevent the underage from smoking," and the final

song is, “We are free, we are independent, we are smart, we don’t smoke.” What is the problem with the script?

1. The script puts forward the idea that smoking is an adult activity, both in the boy’s words, and in the line about the underage not smoking. The boss counters the line, but only weakly.
2. The boss does not give any reasons not to smoke, nor does he state that he himself is a non-smoker. The idea that “the more you learn, the more you will become an expert” could include smoking as something that the boy can learn to be more grown up.
3. The line “Everybody should come forward to prevent the underage from smoking,” suggests the heavy hand of adult authority—precisely the authority against which youth rebel when they smoke. It also, as mentioned, further strengthens the idea that smoking is an adult activity—hence the reason for the boy’s smoking!
4. One way to demonstrate one is “free and independent” is to rebel against adult authority—in this case, against the boss, who tells the boy not to smoke.

Focus group participants said the ad was meaningless, as it offered no reasons not to smoke, and did not indicate whether or not the boss smoked. They said that the ad would be better if the boss said clearly that he doesn’t smoke.

#### *For guardians*

A mother is upset when she learns that her husband has again sent their son to buy cigarettes, as it might cause the son to adopt the habit. The boy’s father agrees not to do so anymore, and the voice-over states, “Every guardian should come forward to prevent the underage from smoking.” The script ends with the same song as above. What is the problem with this script?

1. The mother does not object to the boy’s father smoking; only to him sending the son to buy cigarettes. The ads neglect to mention a few facts: that the father’s smoking is

itself a model to the boy to smoke; the diseases to which the father puts himself at risk by smoking; and the secondhand effects of smoking on the wife and children.

2. Again, the message reinforces that smoking is an adult activity, and something to which youth aspire.
3. Again, the authority figure is being pitted against the youth who aspires to adulthood—suggesting again that youth can successfully rebel and appear as adults if they smoke (which, in this case, is also modeling the father’s behavior, something which youth commonly do).

Focus group participants objected to the fact that the father does not offer to quit smoking—he only says he won’t send the son to buy cigarettes. They felt the ad would only have meaning if the father were to set a positive example for the son by not smoking. They said that as it is, the ad reinforces that smoking is not for youth—meaning that smoking proves adulthood. One participant remarked that forbidden goods have special appeal.

#### *For retailers*

A shopkeeper expresses surprise that a man is buying more cigarettes so soon, and guesses that the man’s son must be stealing cigarettes from his pack. The shopkeeper then announces his intention not to sell cigarettes to children. The voice-over this time addresses the responsibility of buyers and sellers. What is the problem with this script?

1. The script informs young people how to obtain cigarettes if they don’t have the money or are uncomfortable buying them themselves: just slip them from your father’s pack. It can become a sort of game, to see whether your father is smart enough to figure it out or not—whether or not you can get away with it!
2. Again, the suggestion is that adult men smoke (all adult men, judging by the radio scripts), but that children shouldn’t. “Smoking at this age is really a bad habit”, as the shopkeeper says, implies that there is nothing wrong with smoking if you are over age 18.

3. A new source of rebellion and adventure appears in this ad—the game of trying to buy cigarettes. Since there is no law to prevent them, they will of course succeed; in addition, retailers have an excuse, as the previous script reminds them that often children are buying cigarettes for their parents, not themselves.

Focus group participants’ response to the radio scripts was that none gave any reason for not smoking; that the fathers in the ads smoke, and the attraction is to be like one’s father; and that stores will never stop selling to minors, since they would lose money by doing so.

### Television ad

The television ad shows a young boy trying to appear cool by smoking cigarettes. Meanwhile, his classmate gains success in cricket. A girl looks disgusted at the smoking, and joins the cricket player instead; meanwhile, the smoker crushes his (empty) pack of cigarettes and then goes to join them. What is the problem with this ad?

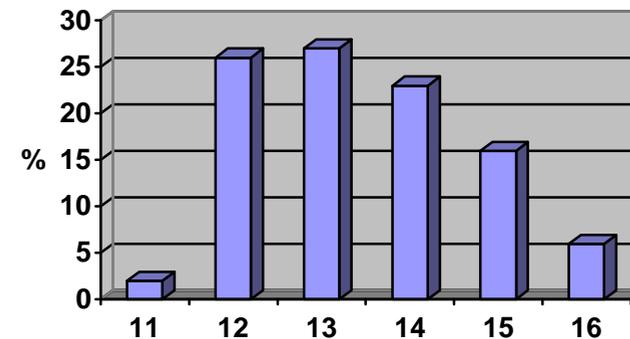
1. Compared to the BAT ads that appear on television for John Player Gold Leaf and B&H, the ad is poorly done. The ad is only thirty seconds long, which makes it difficult to understand the messages, or figure out who did what. The way the boy shows off his cigarette pack, then crumples it, are crude. The ad looks more like something produced by an under-funded health NGO than by a rich tobacco company.
2. While the crumpling of the pack is meant to indicate that the boy is fed up and won’t smoke anymore, the pack appears to be empty. It could just be that he is out of cigarettes.
3. As with the radio scripts and billboard, there is no mention of any of the health effects of smoking, that smoking is addictive, that it causes disease in non-smokers, and that smoking kills.

The focus group participants asked to watch the TV ad a second time, as it wasn’t clear from first viewing what had happened. After the second viewing, a lengthy argument ensued as to what had happened in the ad—who was smoking, who threw the ball to whom, and so on. One participant said, “The ad shows that you shouldn’t smoke during cricket matches.” Another participant complained, “There’s no one famous in the ad. The actors are all unknown, and they have nothing appealing to attract people to the message.” While they found the ad appealing to watch, they did not get an anti-smoking message from it.

## IV. Bangladeshi youth’s awareness of cigarette ads

Most of the 300 male students interviewed were aged 12-15.

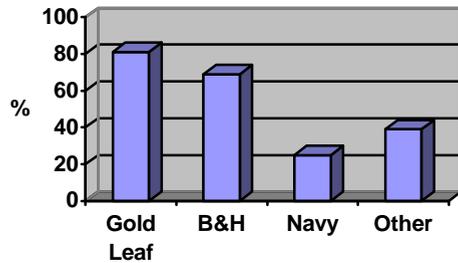
Age of participants



Most (88%) said they had never smoked. Only 3% reported currently smoking at least one cigarette a week, but, as with the focus group participants, they were quite familiar with cigarette ads, especially those for BAT brands.

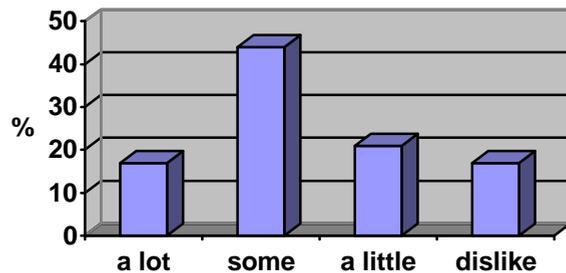
Almost all the students (96%) said they had seen a cigarette ad on television. Of those who had seen one, 81% reported having seen Gold Leaf, 69% B&H, 25% Navy, and 39% named other brands. Gold Leaf and B&H are both BAT brands, revealing high exposure among the youth to BAT TV ads for cigarettes.

**Television ads viewed, by brand**



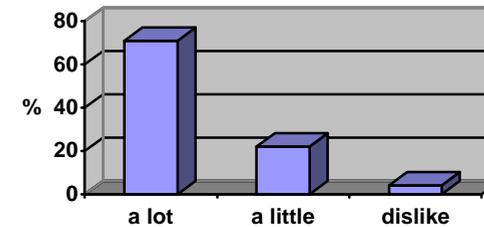
78% of the students said they had seen a B&H rock concert. While most of the students had seen them on TV, 11% said they had seen one live, despite BAT's claim that they do not allow those under 18 to attend their concerts. Most (61%) liked the concerts to some degree or a lot, 21% said they liked the concerts a little, and only 17% said they disliked them.

**Degree of liking of B&H rock concerts**



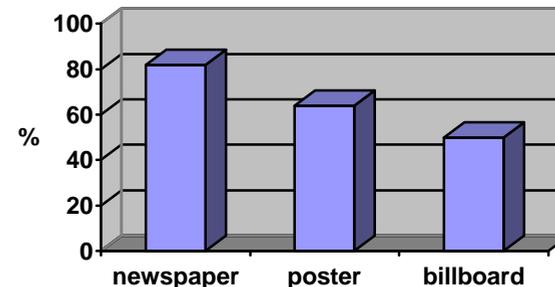
To the question, "Do you think that Benson & Hedges sponsoring rock concerts encourages youth to smoke?", 55% answered yes and 45% no. Most (71%) thought boys their age like the concerts, 22% said they like them a little, and only 4% said they don't like them. Ten students (3%) did not respond.

**Liking of concerts by boys their age**

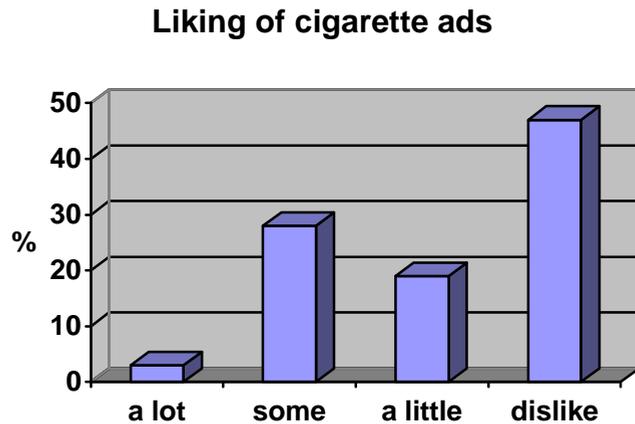


As to exposure to B&H ads, 82% said they had seen a newspaper ad, 64% said they had seen a poster, and 50% said they had seen a billboard. In discussions following the questionnaire, many of the students asked what a billboard is; the results would likely have been higher if they had known!

**Percent having seen types of ads**



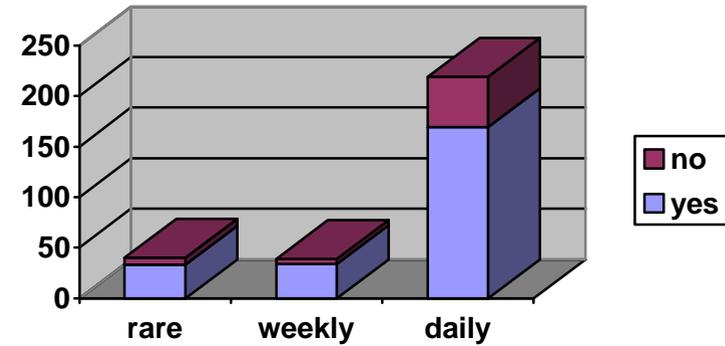
When asked how they like the cigarette ads, 3% said they like them a lot; 28% said they like them; 19% said they like them a little, and 47% said they don't like them, with 3% not responding.



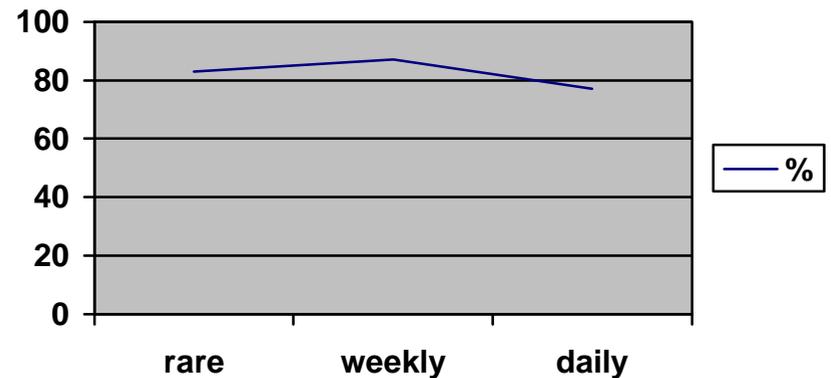
Approval ratings were higher in the few students who smoked: among the 10 current smokers, 1 liked them a lot, 5 liked them, 1 liked them a little, and 3 said they disliked them. Ratings for ever-smokers were almost the same as for non-smokers. The “dislike” category presumably includes students who might find the ads visually appealing, but think it is wrong for BAT to advertise.

Of those watching TV less than once a week, 83% had seen a B&H concert; 87% of those watching TV 1-6 days a week had; and 77% of those watching TV 1-6 hours daily had seen one. That is, those who watch TV rarely were just as likely as those who watch it frequently to have seen a B&H concert, which implies either great frequency of concert showings, or that students make an effort to see them.

**Ever seen B&H concert, by frequency of TV viewing**

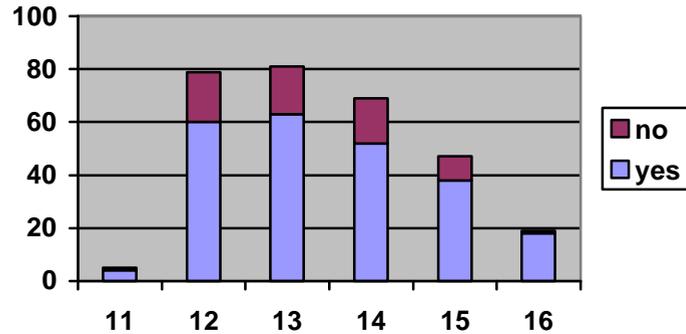


**% viewed concerts, by frequency of TV viewership**

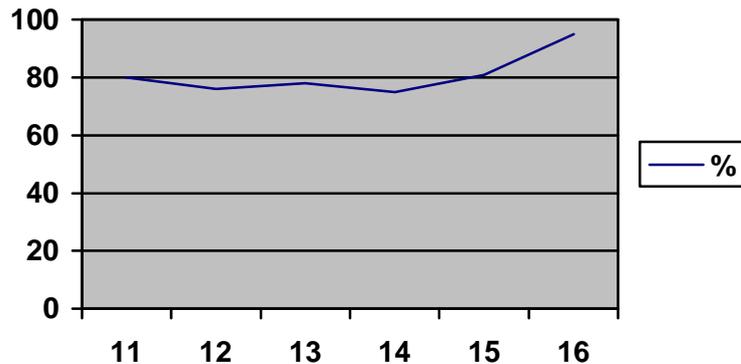


Likelihood of having seen a B&H rock concert also varied little by age, with the majority in all age groups having seen one.

**Viewed B&H concert, by age**



**% viewed B&H concert, by age**



Appealing cigarette ads, unappealing youth prevention ads

*“The first goal of Benson & Hedges rock concerts is to publicize their company, and indirectly to attract adolescents to smoking.”*

--young male student

When BAT and other tobacco companies wish to promote their brands, they use methods that are particularly popular among youth: sponsorship of motorcycle and car racing, rock concerts, sporting events. For example, in India, BAT and India Tobacco Company sponsored cricket through the Wills brand. That sponsorship was found to influence smoking rates and create false perceptions about smoking in Indian school children age 13-16 years. According to the research report, “Despite a high level of knowledge about adverse effects of tobacco, cricket sponsorship increased children’s likelihood of experimenting with tobacco by creating false associations between smoking and sport. Many of the children believed that cricketers smoked.”<sup>18</sup>

In Bangladesh, BAT regularly sponsors rock concerts. Rock concerts are most popular among a young audience, including teenagers. Yet in the BAT Bangladesh youth smoking prevention campaign rock stars are not used. Cricket players are not used. No youth idols are used. The characters in the TV ad, on stickers, and on the billboard are a bland-looking group of youth who hold no special appeal to young people. The radio messages reinforce the idea that smoking is an adult activity, even while claiming to belie it. Nowhere in any of the messages are the harmful effects of tobacco mentioned. Words must be measured against action, and in this case, the actions are clear: BAT has no intention of reducing smoking among youth.

<sup>18</sup> Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), 2000.

## V. Recommendations<sup>19</sup>

- Do not work with BAT on their youth smoking campaign. BAT does not wish to see smoking among youth decline. BAT's prime concern is to improve its image, and by partnering with them, you will help them in doing so.
- Tobacco control measures should never focus only on youth. Such programs make smoking an adult activity, thus increasing its appeal to youth.
- Question BAT's claim that smoking is only a problem for youth. Adults who smoke are prone to a range of diseases and health problems, including emphysema, tuberculosis, impotence, reduced fertility, heart disease, stroke, and cancer of the lung, mouth, breast, and many other sites. When adults smoke around others, non-smokers are subjected to the same chemicals that smokers breathe in, and get some of the same diseases. Helping adults to quit reduces health expenditures, raises quality of life, and makes available for productive purposes money that would otherwise go to buy cigarettes. Any attempt to deal with the problem of smoking must address adults as well as youth.
- Support tobacco control measures that have been proven effective. Measures needed to address the many health and economic problems associated with smoking include a complete ban on all forms of tobacco promotion, bans on smoking in public places and workplaces, aids to help people quit, and higher taxes on all tobacco products.
- If you need information about tobacco, including information about what works best to reduce smoking among youth, or if you would like to learn more about how to become involved in tobacco control, please contact the Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance.

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<sup>19</sup> These recommendations draw heavily on one report: Cancer Research Campaign and Action on Smoking and Health (London), *Danger! PR in the Playground: Tobacco industry initiatives on youth smoking*, 2000. [www.ash.org.uk](http://www.ash.org.uk)

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## Bangladesh's reaction: a case study

When BAT announced its new youth smoking prevention campaign in Bangladesh, Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB), an active member of the Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance (BATA), sprang into action. With technical support from PATH Canada and financial support from Canadian CIDA, in just over two weeks after BAT's launch, WBB, BATA, and PATH Canada had released their joint report and called a press conference to critique the BAT campaign. The 1,000 copies of the report went not only to the media, but to NGOs, UN agencies, the government, and entertainers.

The steps of WBB's reaction:

1. Planning of a response: an informal meeting to discuss what to do, and how quickly a response could be generated. Over the next few days, more specific plans for producing a report and calling a press conference.
2. Gathering of information on industry-sponsored youth prevention campaigns, using particularly the Cancer Research Campaign/ASH (London) report and information from Essential Action's website.
3. Creation of a research plan: a question guide for focus group research, and a questionnaire for an in-school survey.
4. Writing in English of a draft report.
5. Translation of the draft report into Bengali.
6. Conducting of the focus group research. The key findings are in the report below.
7. Conducting of the school survey. Over 300 in-school youth under age 18 were surveyed on one morning.
8. Data entry and analysis.
9. Addition of research to Bengali report. Report completed, edited, printed.
10. Informal meeting of those who will present and answer questions at the press conference.
11. Holding of press conference, and distribution of the report.
12. Celebration—and planning of next steps.

## Appendix: Conducting Research on Youth Campaigns

### A. Sample survey

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: M F

1. Have you ever smoked? Y N
2. Do you smoke now (once a week or more): Y N
3. Do you watch TV?
  - Less than once a week
  - 1-6 times a week
  - 1-6 times a week
  - Daily for \_\_\_\_ hours
4. Have you ever seen cigarette ads on TV?  
Y N (if yes, which brands?) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you ever seen a Benson & Hedges concert? Y N  
if yes: where did you watch it (which TV station/live concert/other)? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What did you think of the Benson & Hedges concert?
  - Liked it a lot
  - Liked it
  - Liked it a little
  - Didn't like it
7. What do you think the purpose of B&H concerts is?
8. Do you think that B&H sponsoring rock concerts encourages kids to smoke? Y N
9. What do people your age think of these concerts?
  - Like them a lot
  - Like them a little
  - Don't like them
10. Have you ever seen an ad for Benson & Hedges?  
Poster: Y N Newspaper ad: Y N Billboard: Y N
11. What do you think of these ads?
  - Like them a lot
  - Like them
  - Like them a little
  - Don't like them
12. What would you think if a tobacco company told you not to smoke?

## B. Using this (or any) survey:

1. Adapt it for your local context. For instance, change from B&H to the most advertised cigarette brand(s) of the company doing the youth prevention program. Ask specifically about rock concerts or sponsored sporting events.
  2. Test it before use, to make sure the questions are clear.
  3. Decide which questions you need and which you don't.
  4. Plan your data analysis in advance—if you will use a computer, set up the form on the computer before you conduct the survey. Make sure you have the time and ability to do the analysis.
  5. Only do the survey if you know how it will be useful for you.
  6. Don't tell people the purpose of the survey until AFTER you finish. Then you can explain, and—if you have the facilities to do so—invite the respondents to work with you on responding to the industry campaign.
  7. Data analysis
- whether more smokers (ever or current) are aware of or have positive feelings about cigarette ads than non-smokers;
  - whether many youth are exposed to tobacco-sponsored rock concerts (or car racing or other tobacco industry-sponsored events in your locale);
  - how aware and approving non-smokers are of cigarette ads (high awareness and approval probably means they are at risk of starting to smoke in future);
  - what sorts of comments youth have about a youth prevention campaign.

The results can then be used to strengthen your argument. For instance, if you want to say that many youth are currently exposed to cigarette ads, you can use your results as evidence. Many youth may spontaneously say that if the industry were serious about youth not smoking, they would stop advertising or stop producing cigarettes. Such quotes can be very helpful in your report/reaction.

The types of information you can get are:

- how many under age 18 boys and girls (and what percentage) are exposed to cigarette ads;
- the feelings of youth about the ads;
- whether awareness of ads and opinions about them varies by sex;

### C. Focus group research

In addition to a questionnaire, you may wish to do qualitative research. It need not be formal focus group research; the point is to get opinions of young people about tobacco advertising and industry-sponsored youth smoking prevention campaigns. A few hints for conducting the research:

- If you have the materials that the tobacco company will be using with youth, show them to the participants. Give them time to look over them thoroughly, then ask what they think of them. Have specific questions at hand, such as:
  - What is the message of this ad?
  - Do you think this ad is attractive compared to the company's cigarette ads? (Use specific examples—for example, if the company doing the youth prevention campaign is Philip Morris, then compare the prevention campaign ads to those for Marlboro cigarettes.)
  - Do you think people your age will understand this ad? Will they like it?
  - What information does the ad provide about smoking? What reasons does the ad give for youth not smoking?
  - Does the ad include popular people or other images likely to appeal to youth?
  - Do you think young people are likely to smoke less as a result of seeing/hearing this ad?
- As with the survey, when you make your list of questions to ask, think about what information you wish to collect.
- Cover the subjects you are interested in, but avoid leading questions. For instance, rather than asking “Do you think that tobacco companies sponsor rock concerts in order to encourage youth to smoke”, ask, “Why do you think tobacco companies sponsor rock concerts (and not other types of events like classical music concerts)?”
- If the participants in your research react with anger to the tobacco industry-sponsored youth prevention campaign, then involve them in protesting against it!