



Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) Pakistan 2013 & 2022



PRESS RELEASE

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Youth Tobacco Use Has Fallen by More Than a Third Since 2013 — But E-Cigarettes Have Arrived, Stick Sales Have Nearly Doubled, and Fewer Young Smokers Are Getting Help to Quit

Islamabad, August 28th, 2026

Pakistan's school-going youth are smoking less than they were a decade ago. But the headline progress conceals a more complicated picture — one in which the product landscape has shifted dramatically, enforcement of access restrictions has weakened, and the systems meant to help young people quit tobacco are reaching fewer of them than before. Data from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS), conducted in Pakistan in 2013 and again in 2022 among students aged 13–15, shows that current tobacco use fell from 10.7% to 6.8% over the nine-year period. Cigarette use declined sharply — from 3.3% to 1.3%. But e-cigarette use now stands at 3.1%, higher than current cigarette use. Smokeless tobacco fell only marginally, from 5.3% to 4.4%. And among those still smoking, the proportion who received professional help to quit dropped from 27.0% to 15.9% — even as more young smokers reported wanting to stop.

What is the Big Data Analysis Series by Gallup?

Gallup Pakistan's Big Data series was initiated by Bilal I. Gilani, Executive Director of Gallup Pakistan. As he explains: *"Pakistan does not suffer from a lack of data, but from limited accessibility and weak translation of numbers into understanding. Gallup Pakistan bridges this gap by analyzing large, often under-used datasets — from PSLM and Labour Force Surveys to Economic Surveys and National Census data — so these statistics can meaningfully inform policy and public discourse."*

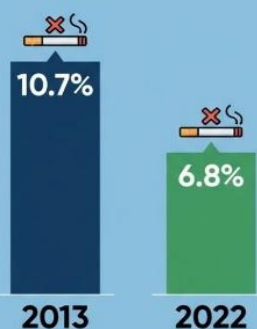
What data points this current edition covers:

This analysis is based on the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) Pakistan 2013 and 2022 fact sheets, and the GYTS EMRO 2022 Enhanced Codebook — covering nationally representative samples of school-enrolled students aged 13–15. Additional derived indicators on dependence, initiation age, and nicotine pouch use are drawn from the 2022 codebook where noted. The full dataset is accessible through the [Gallup Pakistan Digital Analytics dashboard — Pakistan Tobacco Insights](#).

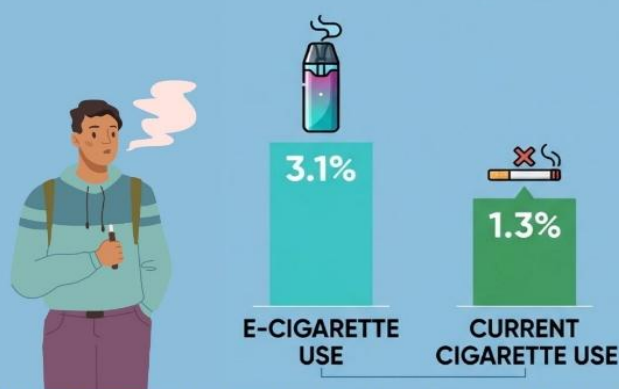
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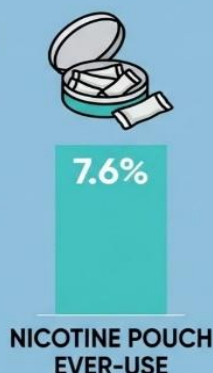
Current tobacco use among students aged **13-15** fell from **10.7%** in **2013** to **6.8%** in **2022** — a relative decline of **36%**. Cigarette use declined the fastest, falling from **3.3%** to **1.3%**.



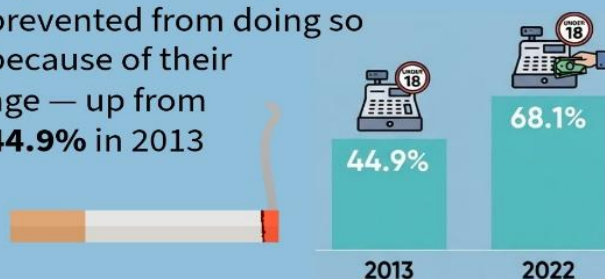
E-cigarette use, not measured in **2013**, stood at **3.1%** in **2022** — already higher than current cigarette use (**1.3%**), making e-cigarettes the most prevalent smoked product among Pakistani youth.



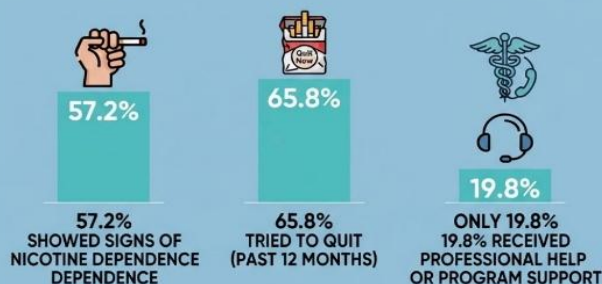
7.6% of students in 2022 reported ever trying nicotine pouches (such as Velo) — a product category not measured in **2013** and not yet widely discussed in tobacco control discourse in Pakistan.



Among students who tried to buy cigarettes in 2022, **68.1%** were not prevented from doing so because of their age — up from **44.9%** in 2013



Among current smokers in **2022**, **57.2%** showed signs of nicotine dependence, and **65.8%** tried to quit in the past **12** months — yet only **19.8%** ever received help from a professional or programme.



Key Findings:

1. Current tobacco use among students aged 13–15 fell from 10.7% in 2013 to 6.8% in 2022 — a relative decline of 36%. Cigarette use declined the fastest, falling from 3.3% to 1.3%.
2. E-cigarette use, not measured in 2013, stood at 3.1% in 2022 — already higher than current cigarette use (1.3%), making e-cigarettes the most prevalent smoked product among Pakistani youth.
3. Smokeless tobacco use declined only marginally from 5.3% to 4.4% over nine years, remaining the second most common form of tobacco use among students.
4. 7.6% of students in 2022 reported ever trying nicotine pouches (such as Velo) — a product category not measured in 2013 and not yet widely discussed in tobacco control discourse in Pakistan.
5. One in four (25.3%) of ever-cigarette smokers in 2022 first tried smoking before the age of 10, and 14.2% before age 7 — indicating that initiation remains concentrated at very young ages.
6. Among current smokers in 2022, 57.2% showed signs of nicotine dependence, and 65.8% tried to quit in the past 12 months — yet only 19.8% ever received help from a professional or programme.
7. The proportion of young smokers who received professional help to quit fell from 27.0% in 2013 to 15.9% in 2022 — a decline of 11.1 percentage points — meaning fewer young smokers are accessing support even as more are trying to quit.
8. Among students who tried to buy cigarettes in 2022, 68.1% were not prevented from doing so because of their age — up from 44.9% in 2013, despite a 2018 regulatory order prohibiting loose cigarette sales.
9. The proportion of young smokers buying cigarettes as individual sticks rose from 35.2% in 2013 to 60.3% in 2022 — directly contradicting the regulatory intent of the 2018 prohibition on single-stick sales.
10. The share of students who definitely believe secondhand smoke is harmful to them dropped from 75.9% in 2013 to 54.5% in 2022 — a decline of 21.4 percentage points, the largest negative trend in the dataset.

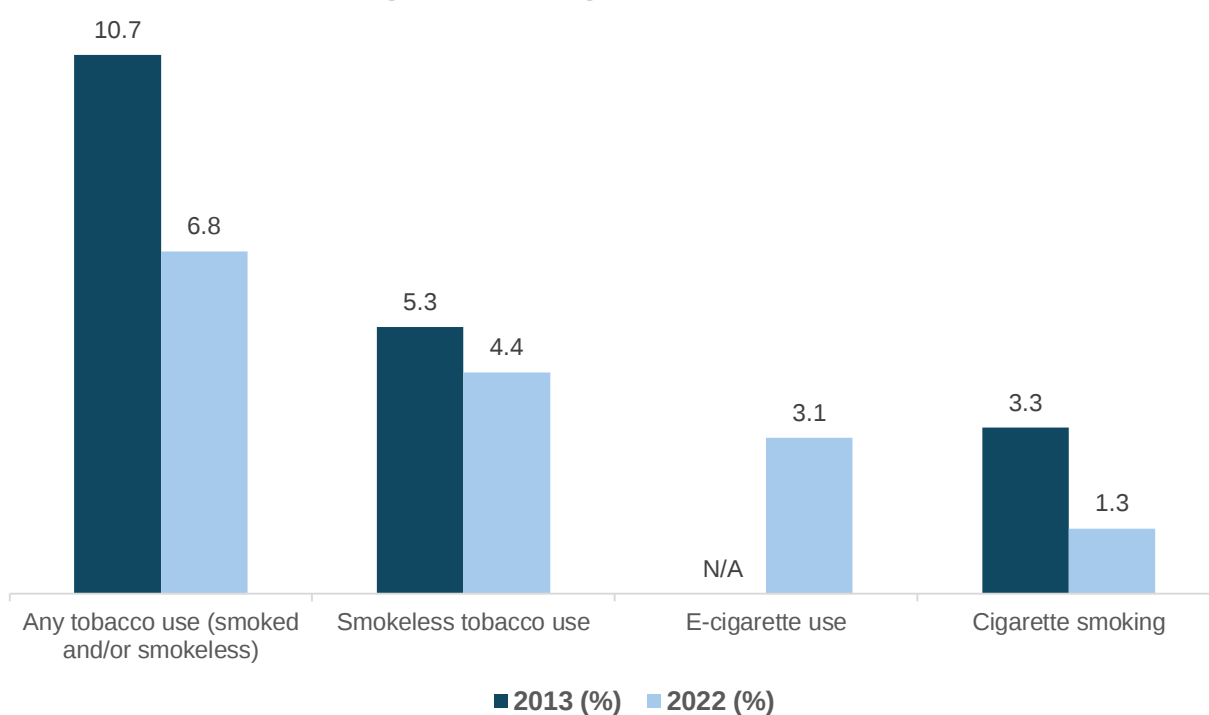
1. Nearly The Headline Decline and What Is Driving It

Youth tobacco use in Pakistan has fallen meaningfully over nine years. Current use of any tobacco product dropped from 10.7% in 2013 to 6.8% in 2022, a relative decline of 36%. The sharpest fall was in cigarette use — from 3.3% to 1.3%, a relative decline of 61% — suggesting that tobacco control measures targeting cigarettes have had a disproportionate impact on this product category. Boys drove most of the absolute decline: current tobacco use among boys fell from 13.3% to 8.5%, while among girls it fell from 6.6% to 4.4%. Ever-use figures also declined: the proportion who had ever tried any tobacco fell from 24.5% to 17.5%, indicating that fewer young people are experimenting with tobacco products at all.

But the composition of what remains has changed fundamentally. In 2013, the product landscape was essentially cigarettes and smokeless tobacco. By 2022, e-cigarettes had emerged as the single most prevalent smoked product among Pakistani youth, at 3.1% — higher than current cigarette use at 1.3%. Smokeless tobacco declined only from 5.3% to 4.4%, a relative fall of just 17% over nine years — far slower than the cigarette decline. And 7.6% of students had ever tried nicotine pouches such as Velo, a product category not tracked in 2013 and not yet systematically addressed in Pakistan's regulatory framework. The overall tobacco use figure of 6.8% therefore represents a concentration of use in harder-to-regulate, newer, or non-combustible products — a structural shift in the nature of youth tobacco exposure that the headline decline does not capture.

The susceptibility data adds a further caution. Among students who had never used tobacco in 2022, 11.8% were susceptible to future use — almost identical to 11.2% in 2013. This means that despite nine years of tobacco control effort, the pipeline of potential new users among never-smokers has not narrowed. The proportion of never-smokers who thought they might enjoy a cigarette was 10.8% in 2022, compared to 15.2% in 2013 — a modest improvement, but one that still means more than one in ten non-smoking students considers experimentation a possibility. Progress in reducing current use has not been matched by equivalent progress in reducing the risk of future uptake.

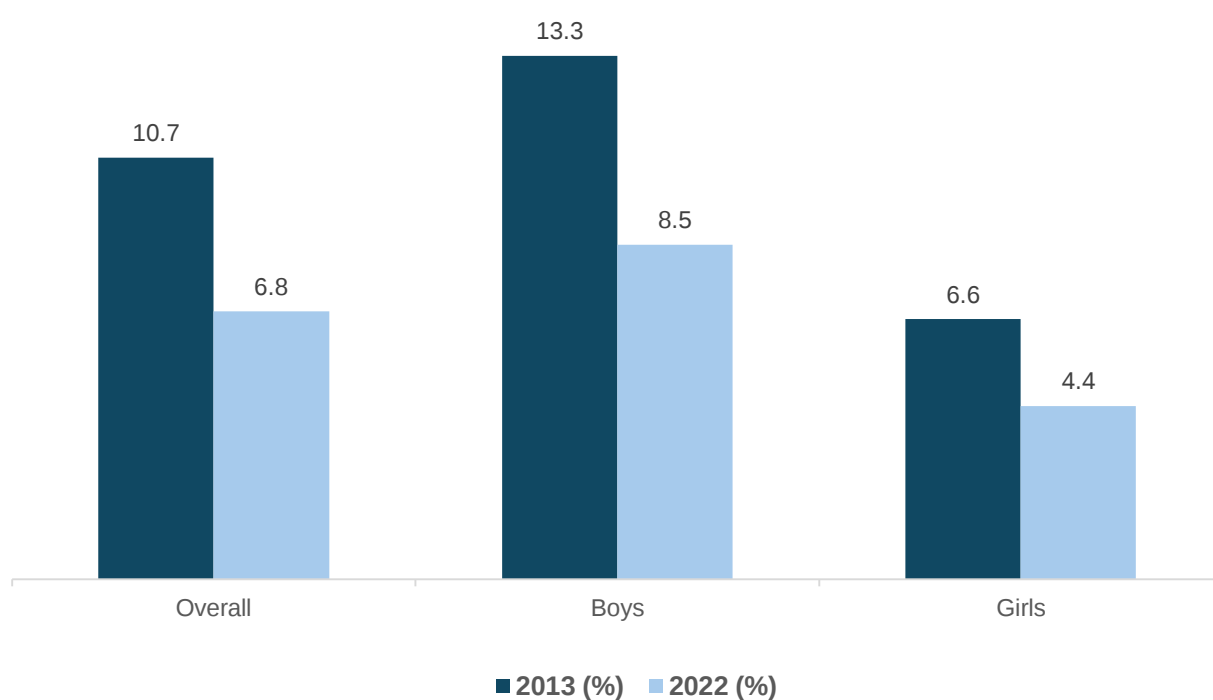
Current tobacco use by product type: 2013 vs 2022 (%)
Students aged 13–15. E-cigarettes not measured in 2013.



Note: E-cigarette use not measured in GYTS 2013. Change column: negative = improvement (fewer students using tobacco). N/A = not applicable.

Source: Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS), Pakistan 2013 and 2022 Fact Sheets. Students aged 13–15.

Current tobacco use by sex: 2013 vs 2022 (%)
Any tobacco use (smoked and/or smokeless), students aged 13–15

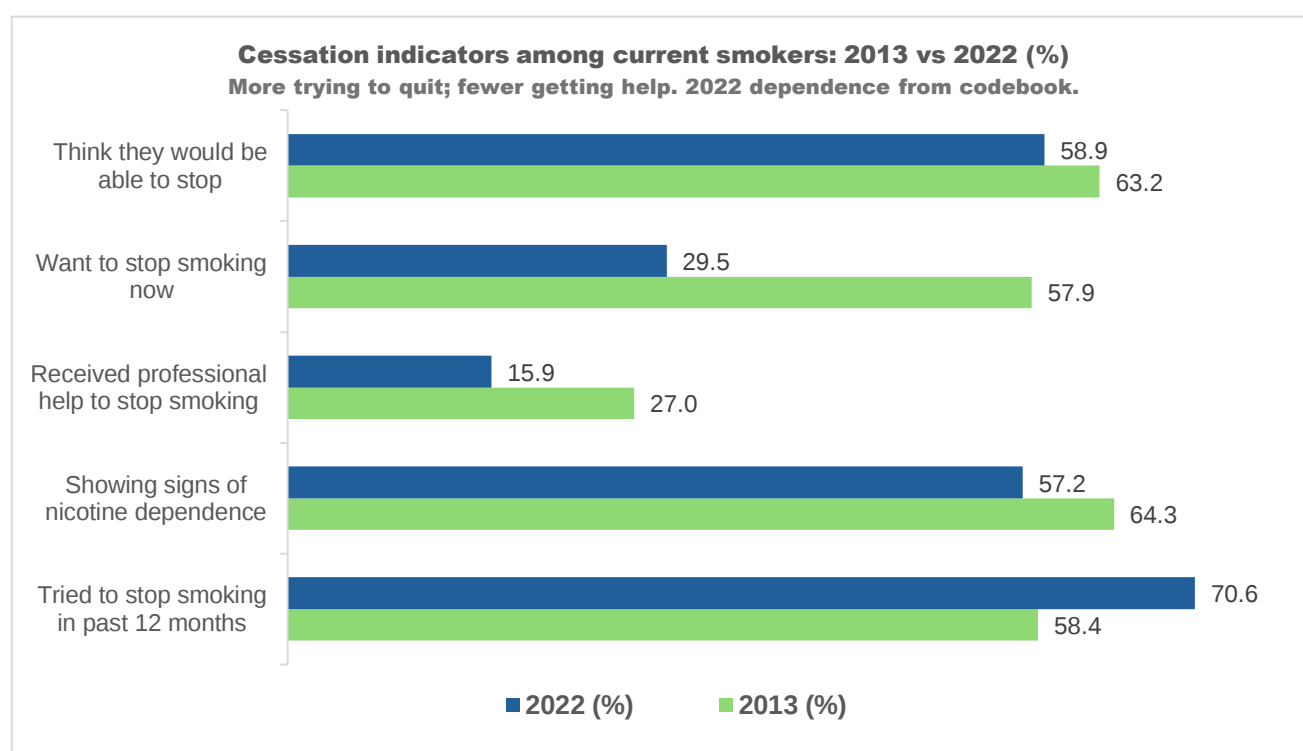


2. One The Cessation Paradox: More Young Smokers Want to Quit, Fewer Are Getting Help

Among students who currently smoked tobacco in 2022, 70.6% reported trying to stop smoking in the past 12 months — up from 58.4% in 2013. This increase suggests that more young smokers are motivated to quit, and that awareness of the harms of tobacco has translated into quit attempts at a higher rate than before. Yet the infrastructure for supporting those attempts has moved in the opposite direction. The proportion of young smokers who ever received help from a programme or professional to stop smoking fell from 27.0% in 2013 to 15.9% in 2022 — a decline of 11.1 percentage points. More students are trying to quit, but fewer are getting meaningful help to do so.

The dependence data from the 2022 codebook illuminates why this matters. Among current smokers, 57.2% showed signs of nicotine dependence — defined as feeling the urge to smoke first thing in the morning or within a short period of resuming. Among those who tried to quit, 62.4% believed they would be able to stop if they wanted to, but only 19.8% had ever received professional support. This gap — between the confidence in one's ability to quit and the actual availability of professional support — describes a population of young smokers who are largely attempting to quit unaided. In a context where more than half show signs of dependence, unaided cessation attempts are substantially less likely to succeed. The 2022 data does not track quit success rates, but the combination of high dependence and low support access is structurally unfavorable.

The age of initiation data sharpens the urgency of the cessation gap further. Among ever cigarette smokers in 2022, 25.3% had first tried smoking before the age of 10, and a further 28.8% initiated between ages 12 and 13. This means that a significant share of the students who are currently trying to quit began using tobacco in primary school — at ages where dependence forms more rapidly and where there is no school-based cessation support infrastructure of any kind in Pakistan. The combination of early initiation, high dependence rates, strong motivation to quit, and minimal access to support defines the core of Pakistan's youth cessation problem.



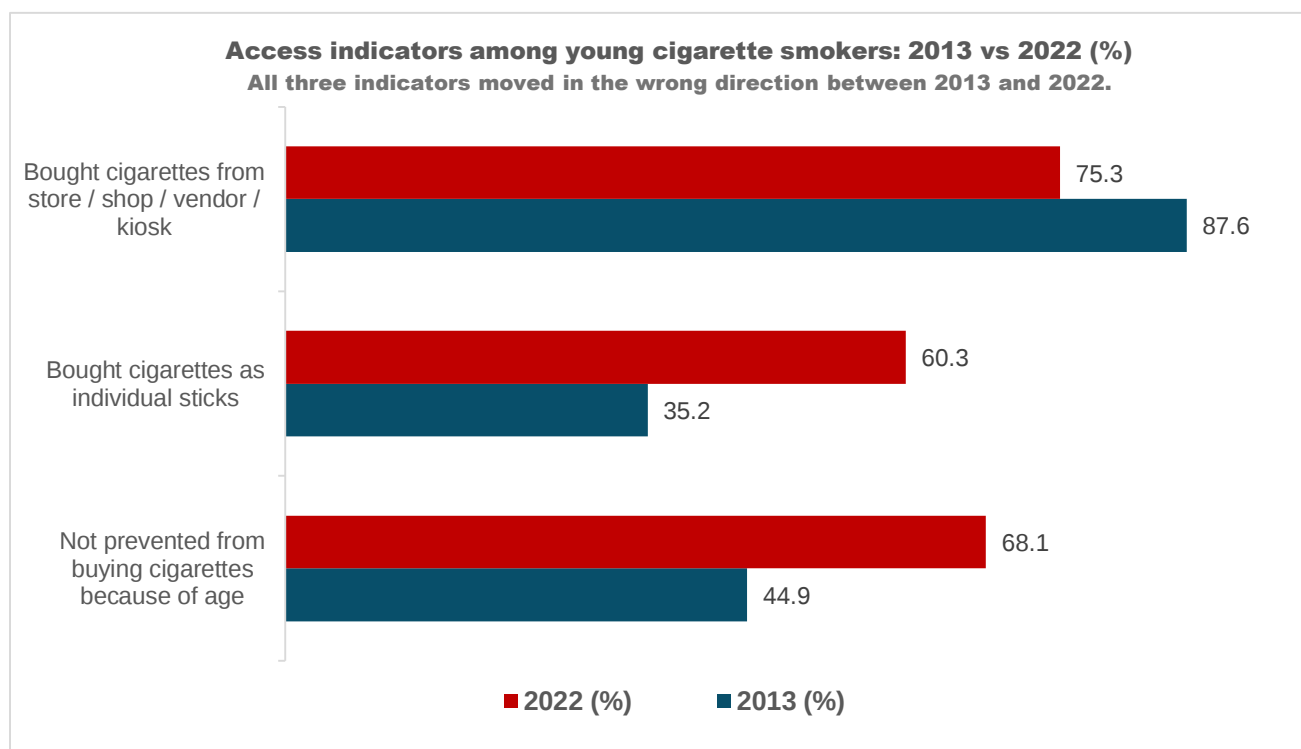
Source: GYTS Pakistan 2013 and 2022 Fact Sheets; GYTS EMRO 2022 Enhanced Codebook. Students aged 13-15.

3. Access, Single Sticks, and a Regulatory Failure Hidden in the Data

One of the most striking findings in the GYTS trend data is not about tobacco use rates but about access. In 2013, 44.9% of young smokers who tried to buy cigarettes reported that no one prevented them from doing so because of their age. By 2022, that figure had risen to 68.1% — meaning that nearly seven in ten young smokers who attempted a purchase were not age-restricted at any point. Pakistan's regulatory framework prohibits tobacco sales to minors, yet over nine years of enforcement, the proportion of youth successfully purchasing without challenge has increased by more than 23 percentage points.

This failure becomes more specific when the single-stick data is examined. In 2013, 35.2% of young smokers bought cigarettes as individual sticks. In 2022, that figure had risen to 60.3% — an increase of 25.1 percentage points. This is directly relevant to a specific regulatory intervention: the Statutory Regulatory Order (S.R.O.) 415(I)/2018, which prohibited the sale of loose cigarettes across Pakistan. By 2022 — four years after the prohibition was enacted — the proportion of young smokers buying single sticks had not fallen; it had nearly doubled. Either enforcement of the 2018 order was effectively non-existent at the point of sale to youth, or the definition of "loose cigarettes" was being interpreted narrowly enough to permit continued single-stick retail. Either interpretation points to a significant gap between regulatory intent and enforcement reality.

The source of cigarettes for young smokers also shifted in a direction that complicates enforcement. In 2013, 87.6% bought from stores, shops, vendors, kiosks, school canteens, or pharmacies. By 2022 this fell to 75.3% buying from stores, shops, vendors, or kiosks — with 20.2% obtaining cigarettes from a friend in 2022, compared to figures not prominently featured in the 2013 data. Peer supply as a route of access is harder to regulate than commercial supply, and its increasing prominence among youth suggests that even if point-of-sale enforcement improved, a growing share of youth tobacco access would route around formal retail channels entirely.



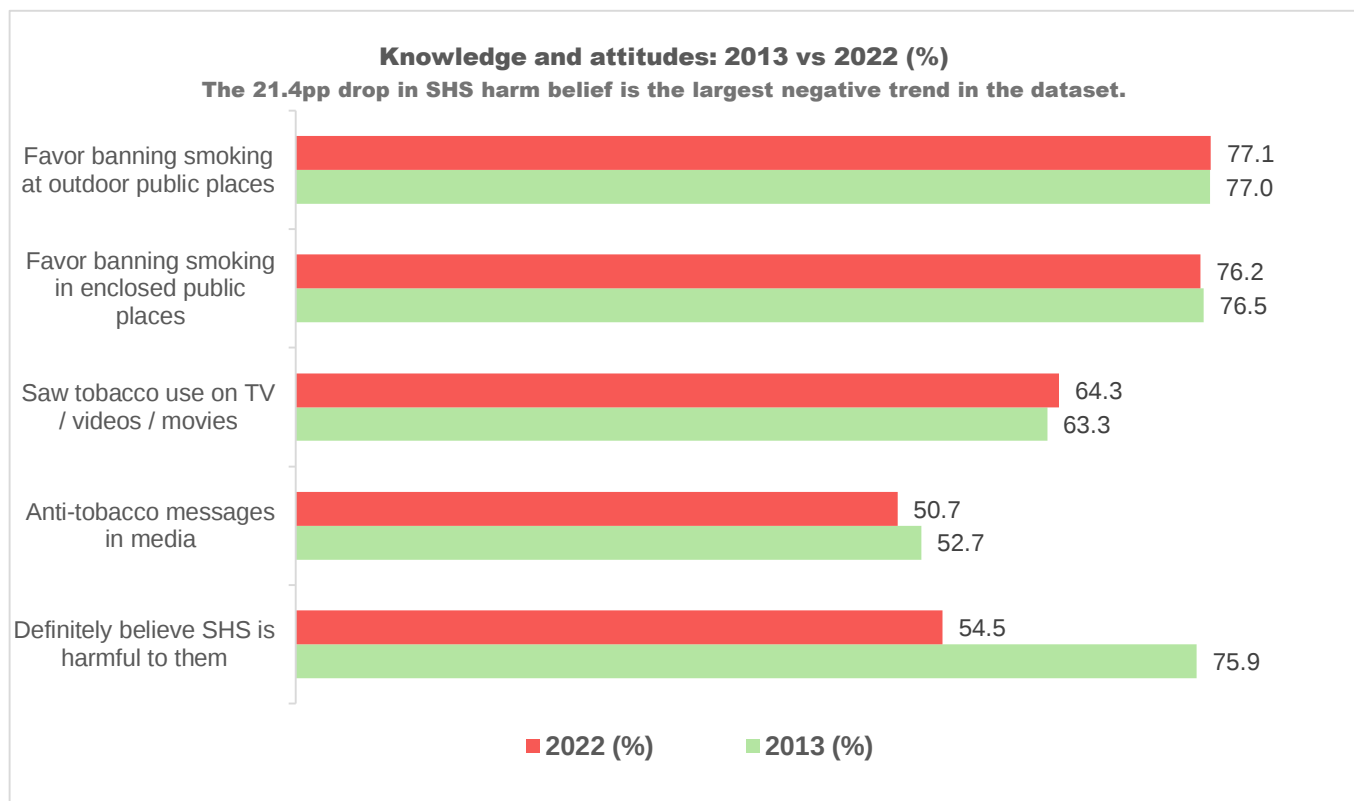
Source: GYTS Pakistan 2013 and 2022 Fact Sheets. Students aged 13-15 who currently smoked cigarettes.

4. Knowledge, Media, and a Declining Belief in the Harm of Secondhand Smoke

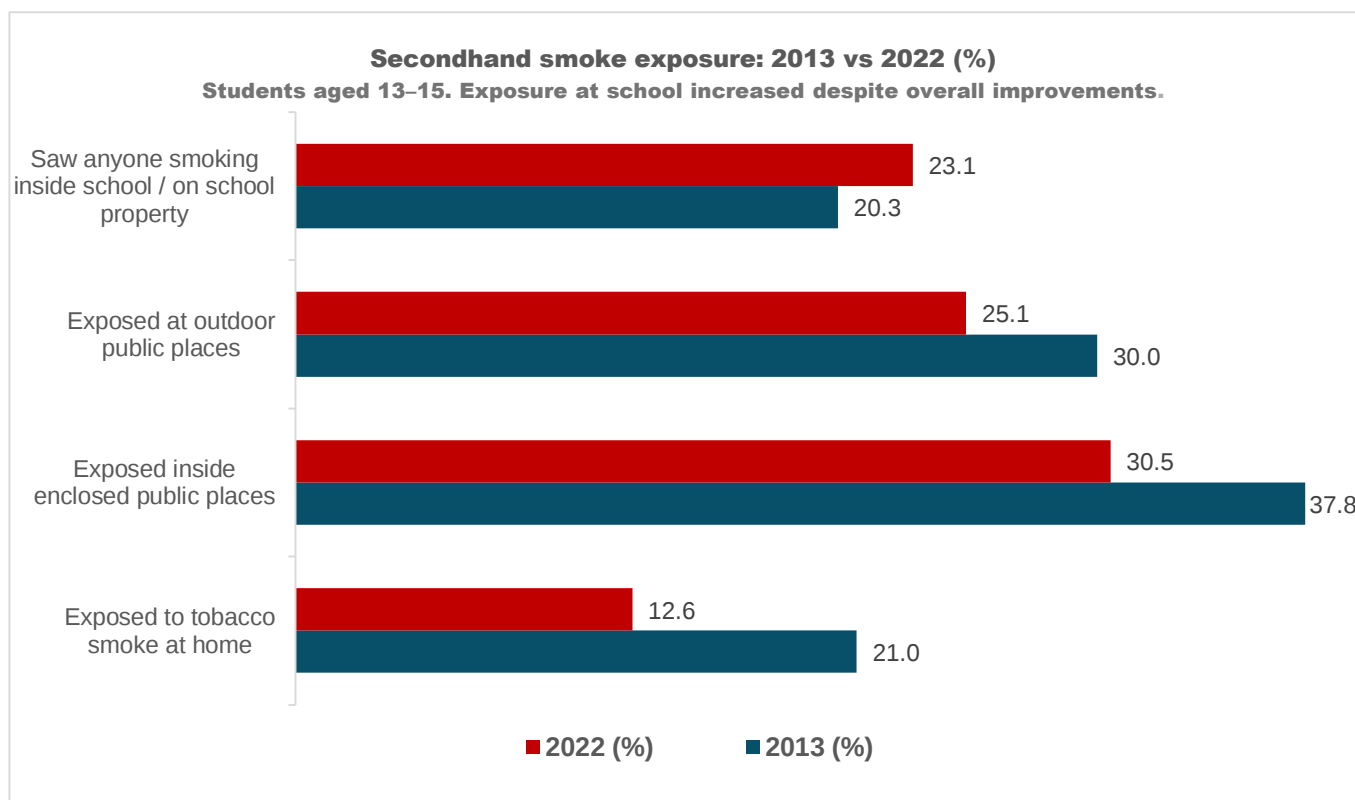
The most unexpected trend in the GYTS data concerns not behavior but belief. In 2013, 75.9% of students aged 13–15 definitely believed that other people's tobacco smoke was harmful to them. By 2022, that figure had fallen to 54.5% — a decline of 21.4 percentage points in nine years. This is the largest negative trend of any indicator in the dataset. At a time when tobacco control messaging has intensified globally, and when Pakistan has enacted multiple regulatory measures, the proportion of young people who are convinced that secondhand smoke is harmful has fallen by more than a fifth.

This decline in knowledge does not reflect a parallel decline in anti-tobacco media exposure. In 2013, 52.7% of students noticed anti-tobacco messages in the media; in 2022, 50.7% did — a marginal change. What changed was not exposure to messaging but its apparent persuasiveness. One possible explanation is the shift in media environment: tobacco use on television, videos, and movies was seen by 63.3% of students in 2013 and 64.3% in 2022 — essentially unchanged. Pro-tobacco media exposure remained high and constant while anti-tobacco messaging held at roughly half the student population. In a media environment where tobacco use remains normalized in entertainment content at the same rate as a decade ago, the persuasive power of anti-tobacco messages may be eroding.

The attitudes data from the 2022 codebook reinforces the concern. Only 6.2% of students in 2022 definitely believed that quitting tobacco, once started, is difficult — a remarkably low figure given that 57.2% of current smokers showed signs of dependence. This mismatch between perceived difficulty and actual difficulty is directly relevant to cessation: students who underestimate how hard it is to quit are less likely to avoid initiation and less likely to seek support when they try. Additionally, 27.3% of students believed smoking makes people feel more comfortable at social gatherings, and 21.9% believed young smokers are more attractive — attitudinal beliefs that the tobacco industry actively cultivates and that remain stubbornly present in the 2022 data despite nine years of tobacco control effort. The knowledge and attitudes trajectory in Pakistan's youth tobacco data points to a population where behaviors are improving faster than underlying beliefs — a pattern that, without correction, risks reversing the behavioural gains over time.



Note: All percentages are for students aged 13-15. SHS = secondhand smoke. Red = worsened trend, green = improvement, gray = stable or mixed.



Source: GYTS Pakistan 2013 and 2022 Fact Sheets; GYTS EMRO 2022 Enhanced Codebook. Students aged 13-15.

About the Global Tobacco Surveillance System (GTSS)

The Global Tobacco Surveillance System (GTSS) is a WHO-coordinated initiative that supports countries in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data on tobacco use and the impact of tobacco control policies. In Pakistan, GTSS data is collected through two standardized surveys:

The [Global Adult Tobacco Survey \(GATS\)](#) is a nationally representative household survey of adults aged 15 and older, designed to systematically monitor adult tobacco use and track key tobacco control indicators. In Pakistan, GATS was conducted in 2014 and repeated in 2024 by the National Institute of Population Studies Training and Research (NIPS&TR), under the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHSR&C), in coordination with the WHO and the CDC Foundation.

The [Global Youth Tobacco Survey \(GYTS\)](#) is a nationally representative school-based survey of students in grades associated with ages 13 to 15, designed to monitor youth tobacco use and track tobacco control indicators among young people. In Pakistan, GYTS was conducted in 2013 and repeated in 2022.

Both surveys use standardized methodologies to produce nationally representative data comparable across countries and over time, and form the evidence base for Pakistan's National Tobacco Control Strategy 2022–2030.



Wish to Contribute to Gallup Big Data Analysis?

Gallup Pakistan is looking for collaboration with researchers to expand the Big Data Analysis project. If you have any ideas, please write to Bilal I Gilani, Project Director, Big Data Analysis at Gallup Pakistan.

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