

## **When is Smoking Unethical in the Army?**

I am a smoker and I smoke whenever an opportunity presents itself, whether in civilian clothes or in military uniform. I don't consider my smoking as bad, undisciplined, ungentelemanly, unpleasant, unhealthy, or vexatious to others. I couldn't care any less of what others say about my smoking since I buy my own cigarettes from my very own money, believing that I have the right to dispose my income to whatever that makes me relatively happy without having to affect others directly. I believe that other smokers think just like I do, uncaring of what others think of us smokers. What only matters is the good feeling of inhaling the smoke.

On the other hand, I try to balance things by having learned to become more sensitive to others' need or preference to be in the company or to be in an environment of a free-smoke, I definitely wouldn't want to irritate the non-smokers. Where there is a non-smoking policy in an office / any facilities, and likewise at places declared as "non smoking area", I strictly observe the rules and regulations.

Moreover, I make it a point not to smoke inside my house, not wanting the smell to linger inside the house. I am quite cautious about not passing the second hand smoke to my family members, much less be labeled by my kids with "*yosi kadiri*" – a famous Philippine slogan in the anti-smoking campaign in a rhyme which literally means cigarettes are dirty or simply "a smoker is dirty" socially, morally, emotionally, unhealthy, and even outcast in the society.

Admittedly, I can't remember how many times I tried to quit from smoking. I was never successful though for until now I still do. I always say that I will stop smoking

when the price becomes unaffordable. Prices went up the nth times and yet I am still in my old habit. Is it because I can always get my nicotine supply at a lower price somewhere?

With the gradual success of anti-smoking campaigns in the Philippines however, citizens have become practically aware of hazardous effects of smoking to overall health. Prior to such campaign, I have always suspected that private citizens would prefer their soldiers not to smoke as they are supposed to be role models and do what is viewed as good or virtue.

The Philippine Army discourages smoking among its members by way of including such campaign into its program. Among the campaign programs it has launched so far are: conducting information drive about the risks of smoking to one's health and to passive smokers; extending assistance to members enrolled in the "Quit Smoking Program"; prohibiting smoking inside the office/building/facilities/centralized enlisted housing; and designating smoking areas. Ironically, while it campaigns against the use of tobacco products, millions of cigarette packs and other tobacco products are sold in a year through its commissaries and Post Exchange (PX) outlets. The government exempts commissary and PX goods from sales tax as a way of easing the cost of living of soldiers and their families. Aside from sales tax exemption, the government also subsidizes cigarettes and other tobacco products to further bring down the price to an affordable level.

Smoking lowers productivity level. Productivity is lost because of illnesses caused by tobacco. The Philippine Army's medical centers register annually a significant number of soldiers afflicted with all kinds of respiratory illnesses ranging from persistent

cold to cancer. Medical expenses in treating these diseases are so huge that the tobacco subsidy looked insignificant. Effective military strength decreases from sickness, and tobacco related illnesses contribute enormously in the number of patients recorded in the Army's medical centers. Deaths from tobacco related diseases in the Philippine Army equal if not exceed the deaths suffered in combat.

Yes, the Philippine Army continues to rigidly pursue its anti-tobacco policies and campaign programs among its members and their immediate families in the same manner as it continues to sell cigarettes and other tobacco products in the commissary and PX at a discounted price. Isn't this inconsistency, ridiculous and unethical?

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