

## Young people's opinion on tobacco taxation

### Background

One of the most effective tools to stop people taking up smoking and encourage smokers to quit is to increase the price of cigarettes and tobacco (World Health Organization, 2008). The New Zealand Government has annually raised the excise tax on tobacco since 2010, and has committed to continue this annual increase until at least 2016 (New Zealand House of Representatives, 2012). A key source of New Zealand data on youth smoking is the Health Promotion Agency's (HPA's) Youth Insights Survey (YIS). The YIS monitors Year 10 students' behaviours, attitudes and knowledge on a range of tobacco-related topics, including about their opinions on the taxation of tobacco.

### Methodology

To regularly monitor young people's opinions about tobacco control and aid the development of appropriate health promotion strategies, respondents in the 2012 YIS answered a few questions about their opinion on tobacco taxation.

Responses to these questions were examined by:

- smoking status
  1. never smoked
  2. current smokers (smoke at least monthly)
  3. ex (no longer smoke) and experimental (smoke less often than monthly) smokers
- susceptibility to smoking
  1. non-susceptible never smokers (who said they would 'definitely not' accept a cigarette offered by their best friend or smoke a cigarette during the next 12 months)
  2. susceptible never smokers
- ethnicity
- gender.

When looking at the differences by ethnicity and gender we have controlled for smoking status. This means that we take into account whether or not a respondent smokes, to ensure that any differences found by ethnicity or gender are not in fact due to the respondent's own smoking status. Only those differences between groups that were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) are reported.

### Opinion about taxation

All respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that 'tax on cigarettes and tobacco should be increased every year'. Around two-thirds (63%, 60-65%) agreed, 17% (16-19%) disagreed, and 20% (19-22%) didn't know. Those more likely to 'agree' were:

- never smokers (70%), compared with ex/experimental smokers (58%); and both never and ex/experimental smokers compared with current smokers (17%)
- non-Māori (66%), compared with Māori (51%).

Respondents were also asked about their level of agreement with the statement that 'the extra money from tobacco tax increases should be used to help smokers wanting to quit'. Three-quarters (74%, 72-76%) agreed with this statement, 12% (11-13%) disagreed, and 14% (12-15%) didn't know. Those more likely to 'agree' were:

- never smokers (78%), compared with ex/experimental smokers (72%); and both never and ex/experimental smokers compared with current smokers (52%).

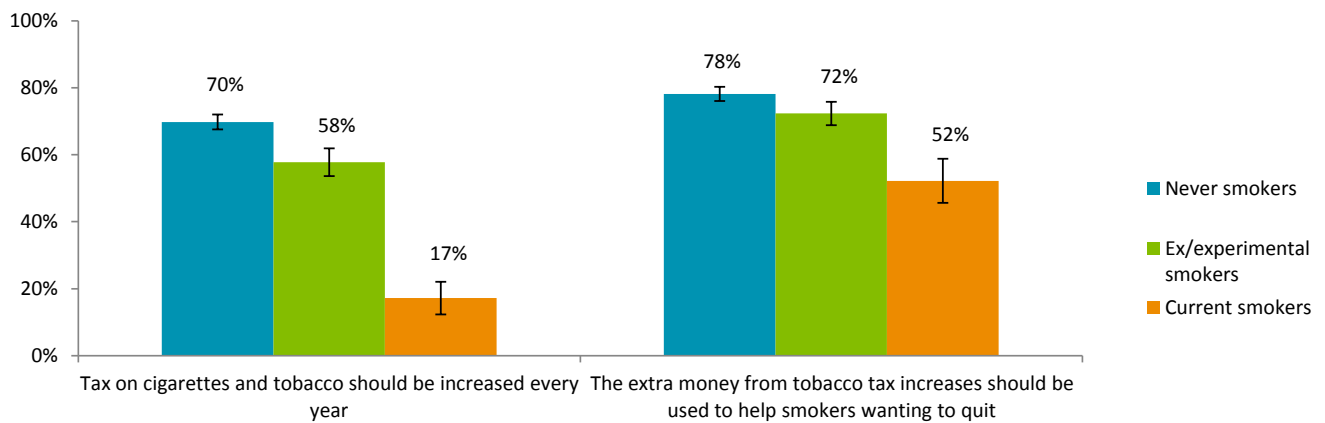
### How do young people's opinions compare with the general public?

Equivalent questions around opinion on tobacco taxation were asked of the general public in the 2012 Health and Lifestyles Survey (HLS). In the 2012 HLS around two-thirds (64%) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'tax on cigarettes and tobacco should be increased every year', and around three-quarters (78%) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'the extra money from tobacco tax increases should be used to help smokers wanting to quit' (Newcombe & Li, 2013). These rates are similar to those reported here for young people in the 2012 YIS, where 63% and 74% 'agreed' respectively.

## Key points

- The majority of New Zealand Year 10 students agreed with the potential tobacco taxation measures. Around two-thirds of New Zealand Year 10 students agreed that tax on cigarettes and tobacco should be increased every year, and three-quarters agreed that the extra money gained through tobacco taxation should be used to help smokers who want to quit.
- Those who had never smoked and ex/experimental smokers were more likely than current smokers to agree with annual tax increases and that tobacco tax should be used to help smokers quit.
- Although current smokers were less likely than others to agree with the potential taxation measures, one in six did agree that tax on cigarettes and tobacco should be increased every year, and one in two that the extra money gained through tobacco taxation should be used to help smokers who want to quit (Figure 1).
- Rates of overall agreement with potential tobacco taxation measures for young people are similar to those previously found for the general public.

**Figure 1: Proportion of respondents who agreed with potential taxation measures, by smoking status**



## About the Youth Insights Survey

- The YIS forms part of the New Zealand Youth Tobacco Monitor (NZYTM), a collaborative effort by the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH).
- The YIS is a nationwide paper-based survey conducted in schools every two years, first carried out in its current form in 2006 and dating back to 1995 in different formats.
- The YIS collects data on smoking-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour, as well as data on students' interests, lifestyles, activities, media use, and responses to tobacco control initiatives. It monitors a broad spectrum of risk and protective factors that relate to smoking uptake among young people.
- The 2012 YIS was conducted with a sample of 3,143 Year 10 students (14 to 15-year-olds). The school-level response rate was 77%, the student level response rate 82%, and the overall response rate was 65%. The sample included 1,589 NZ European, 704 Māori, 295 Pacific, 340 Asian, and 199 people of 'Other' ethnicity (prioritised ethnicity). Seven percent (n = 222) were current smokers (smoke daily, weekly or monthly).
- The data have been adjusted (weighted) to ensure they are representative of the population of New Zealand Year 10 school students.
- For this analysis, proportions and 95% confidence intervals were produced. Odds ratios were undertaken to compare responses between groups. The significance level used for statistical analyses was set to  $\alpha=0.05$ .
- Comparison groups for these analyses were as follows:
  - Smoking status (current smokers, compared with ex/experimental smokers and never smokers).
  - Smoking susceptibility (susceptible never smokers, compared with non-susceptible never smokers; as determined by answers to the questions 'If one of your best friends offered you a cigarette, would you smoke it?' and 'At any time during the next year (12 months) do you think you will smoke a cigarette?', where non-susceptible never smokers answered 'definitely not' to both questions, and susceptible never smokers answered anything except 'definitely not').
  - Ethnicity (Māori, compared with non-Māori).
  - Gender (females, compared with males).
- A full description of the 2012 YIS methodology and further YIS publications can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

## About the HPA

The HPA is a Crown entity that leads and delivers innovative, high quality and cost-effective programmes and activities that promote health, wellbeing and healthy lifestyles and prevent disease, illness and injury. The HPA also enables environments that support health and wellbeing and healthy lifestyles and reduce personal, social and economic harm.

## References

- Newcombe, R., & Li, J. (2013). *Public opinion on tobacco taxation. [In Fact]*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency Research and Evaluation Unit.
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