

Parental influence on children's smoking

Background

Parents' smoking and their attitudes about smoking are key influences in predicting whether children and young people will start and continue to smoke. A New Zealand nationwide survey of Year 10 students showed that those who had at least one parent who smoked were three times more likely to be daily smokers, compared with those whose parents did not smoke.¹

In the Health Sponsorship Council's (HSC's) 2008 Health and Lifestyles Survey (HLS), respondents were asked a series of questions to assess their perceptions of parental influence on children's smoking. Smokers were also asked if they worried about influencing children to smoke and whether setting an example for children had led them to think about quitting or try quitting. Those who had quit smoking recently were asked whether setting an example for children had led them to stay quit.

Overview of key findings

- Almost all (92%) respondents agreed that it is important for parents and caregivers to tell their children they don't want them to smoke.
- Three in five (61%) respondents agreed that children who see their parents smoke are more likely to take up smoking.
- Over one-half (54%) of current smokers reported that, in the last month, they worried that their smoking around children will influence them to start or continue smoking.
- Over one-half (57%) of current smokers reported that, in the last six months,

setting an example to children has led them to think about quitting smoking.

- Two-thirds (68%) of current smokers and recent quitters reported that setting an example to children has led them to quit smoking or to stay quit.

Research details

Methodology

All respondents (n=1,608) were asked for their levels of agreement ('strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree') with the following two statements:

- Children who see their parents smoke are more likely to become smokers themselves.
- It is important that parents and caregivers tell their children that they don't want them to smoke.

Response categories were aggregated and proportions were calculated. Responses were compared by a range of socio-economic and demographic characteristics and statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) are reported:

- Parent/caregiver status (Parent/caregiver etc of 0 to 16 years old, compared with non-parent/caregiver etc of 0 to 16 years old).
- Ethnicity (Māori, compared with non-Māori).
- Neighbourhood deprivation status (high - NZDep 8-10 and medium - NZDep 4-7, compared with low - NZDep 1-3).

Parental influence on children's smoking (continued)

- Age (25 to 34 years, 35 to 54 years, and 55 + years, compared with 15 to 24 years).
- Gender.

Smokers and recent quitters were asked additional questions:

- Current smokers (those who smoked at least monthly) were asked in the last month, how often, if at all, did you worry that your smoking will influence children around you to start or continue smoking ('never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' or 'very much')?
- Smokers (those who reported any level of smoking) who had not tried to quit smoking in the past 12 months were asked in the past six months, to what extent has 'setting an example for children' led you to think about quitting ('not at all', 'somewhat', 'very much')?
- Smokers (those who reported any level of smoking) who had tried to quit smoking in the past 12 months were asked to what extent did 'setting an example for children' lead you to try quitting ('not at all', 'somewhat', 'very much')?
- Recent quitters (those who have quit smoking in the last 12 months) were asked to what extent did 'setting an example for children' lead you to stay quit ('not at all', 'somewhat', 'very much')?

For these additional questions, proportions were calculated. The last two questions measuring behavioural responses around quitting were combined.

Detailed findings

Are children with smoking parents more likely to smoke?

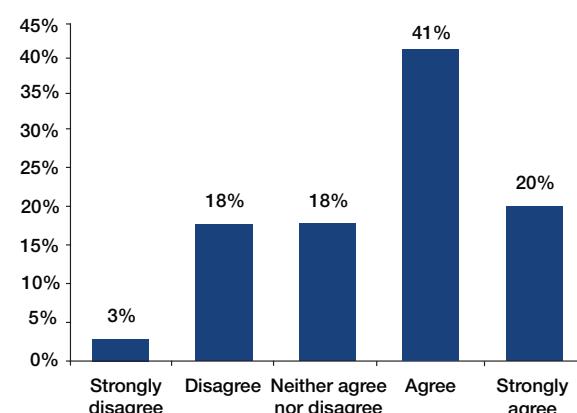
About three in five (61%) respondents 'agreed' (41%) or 'strongly agreed' (20%) that children who see their parents smoke are more likely to become smokers themselves. About one in five (21%) 'disagreed' (18%) or 'strongly disagreed' (3%) with this statement. Fewer than one in five respondents (18%) 'neither agreed nor disagreed' (see Figure 1).

Respondents who had a higher proportion of agreement (combined 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed' responses) with this statement were:

- Around seven in 10 (71%) 15 to 24-year-olds, compared with six in 10 (60%) 35 to 54-year-olds and around five in 10 (55%) 55-year-olds or over.
- Around two in three (65%) males, compared with three in five (56%) females.

There were no differences by being a parent/caregiver, ethnicity, or neighbourhood deprivation status.

Figure 1. Agreement that children who see their parents smoke are more likely to smoke



Parental influence on children's smoking (continued)

Is it important that parents and caregivers tell their children they don't want them to smoke?

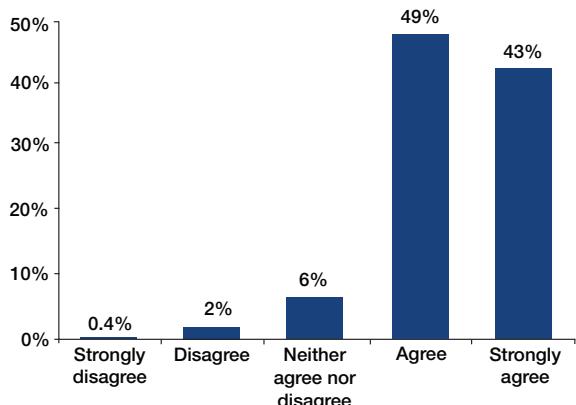
Almost all respondents (92%) 'agreed' (49%) or 'strongly agreed' (43%) that it is important that parents and caregivers tell their children that they don't want them to smoke. A small proportion 'disagreed' (2%) or 'strongly disagreed' (0.4%) with this statement, or reported that they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' (6%) (see Figure 2).

Respondents who showed higher agreement (combined 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed' responses) with this statement were:

- Almost all (95%) parent/caregivers, compared with around nine in 10 (91%) non-parent/caregivers.
- Almost all (95%) respondents living in neighbourhoods of low deprivation status, compared with nine in 10 (90%) of those living in neighbourhoods of high deprivation status.

There were no differences by ethnicity, age, or gender.

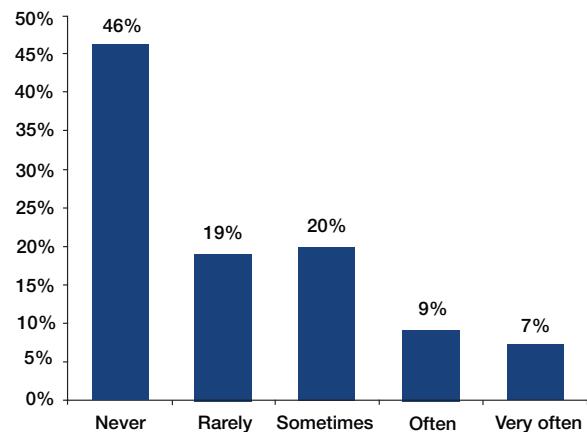
Figure 2. Agreement that it is important to tell children that they don't want them to smoke



Are smokers worried that they will influence their children's smoking behaviours?

Less than one-fifth (16%) of current smokers reported that, in the last month, they 'often' (9%) or 'very often' (7%) worried that their smoking around children will influence them to start or continue smoking, while one-fifth (20%) reported that they 'sometimes' worried about it. Almost two-thirds (65%) said they 'rarely' (19%) or 'never' (46%) worry about it (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. The extent to which current smokers worried that their smoking will influence children around them

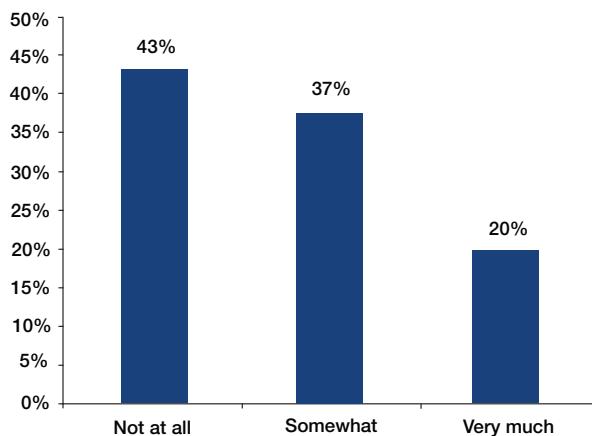


Does setting an example to children lead smokers to think about quitting smoking?

Over three in five (57%) smokers who had not made a quit attempt in the past 12 months reported that, in the last six months, setting an example to children had 'somewhat' (37%) or 'very much' (20%) led them to think about quitting smoking, while the remaining (43%) said 'not at all' (see Figure 4).

Parental influence on children's smoking (continued)

Figure 4. The extent to which setting an example for children had led smokers to think about quitting in the past six months

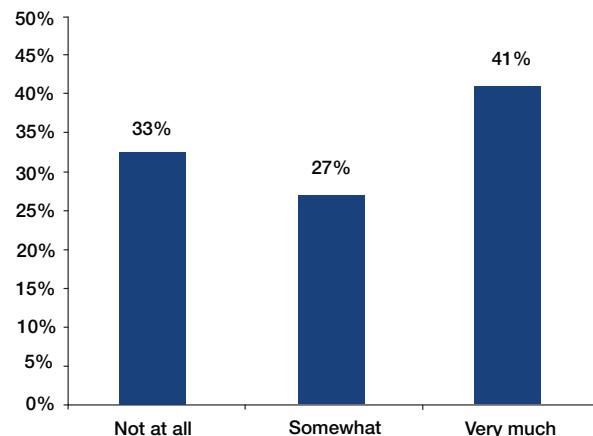


Does setting an example to children help smokers to try quitting and stay quit?

Two-thirds (68%) of smokers and quitters reported that setting an example to children

had 'somewhat' (27%) or 'very much' (41%) led them to try quitting or stay quit, while the remaining (33%) were not led to try quitting or stay quit by setting an example to children (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. The extent to which setting an example for children had led smokers and recent quitters to try quitting or stay quit



About the Survey

- The HLS is a nationwide in-home face-to-face survey conducted every two years. The first HLS was carried out in 2008 with a sample of 1,608 New Zealanders aged 15 years and over, who provided information about their health behaviours and attitudes relating to tobacco, sun safety, healthy eating, and gambling.
- Among the total sample, 26% were current smokers (smoked at least monthly) and 27% were smokers (included those who smoked at least monthly or less often than that). A total of 2% of the sample were former smokers who had quit smoking in the past 12 months.
- The main sample, with a response rate of 64%, included 818 people of European/Other ethnicity, 392 Māori, 324 Pacific peoples and 74 Asian people.
- The data have been adjusted (weighted) to ensure they are representative of the New Zealand population.
- The significance level used for statistical analyses was set to $\alpha = 0.05$.
- A full description of the 2008 HLS survey methodology and further HLS publications can be found online at www.hsc.org.nz/researchpublications.html.

Reference :

¹ Paynter, J. (2007). National Year 10 ASH snapshot survey, 1999-2007: Trends in tobacco use by students aged 14-15 years. Wellington: Ministry of Health, Action on Smoking and Health, Health Sponsorship Council.

Citation

Li, J. (2010). *Parental influence on children's smoking* [In Fact]. Wellington: Health Sponsorship Council.