

What makes quitting difficult?

Background

One of the New Zealand Government's six health targets for 2009/10 is better help for smokers to quit. To achieve this target, it is useful to understand what makes quitting difficult for people and the barriers to successful quitting. In the Health Sponsorship Council's (HSC's) 2008 Health and Lifestyles Survey (HLS), past smokers and smokers who had tried quitting smoking were asked about what made it difficult to quit smoking.

Overview of key findings

The main things that made quitting smoking difficult were others' smoking or smoking in the environment, the habit of smoking, and stress. Around one-third of respondents mentioned each of these difficulties. Differences across key groups were as follows:

- Women and young people were more likely to say that others' smoking made quitting difficult.
- Women were more likely to say that stress made quitting difficult.
- Non-Māori and older people were more likely to say that the habit of smoking made quitting difficult.
- People's responses did not differ by whether they had successfully quit or not, or by socio-economic status.

Research details

Methodology

Smokers (those who smoked at least monthly and those who smoked less often than once a month), who had tried to quit smoking in the past 12 months (n=210) and recent quitters (those who had quit smoking in the past 12

months) (n=34) were asked **what things made it difficult or hard for you to quit smoking?** Respondents could give multiple responses, and their answers were categorised into one or more response options. Figure 1 shows categories for responses > 5%.

The three most common responses (others' smoking, habit, and stress) were then compared by:

- Quit status (smokers, compared with recent quitters).
- Ethnicity (Māori, compared with non-Māori).
- Neighbourhood deprivation status (NZDep 8 to 10, compared with NZDep 1 to 7).
- Age (25 to 34 years, 35 to 54 years, and 55 + years, compared with 15 to 24 years).
- Gender.

Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) are reported.

Detailed findings

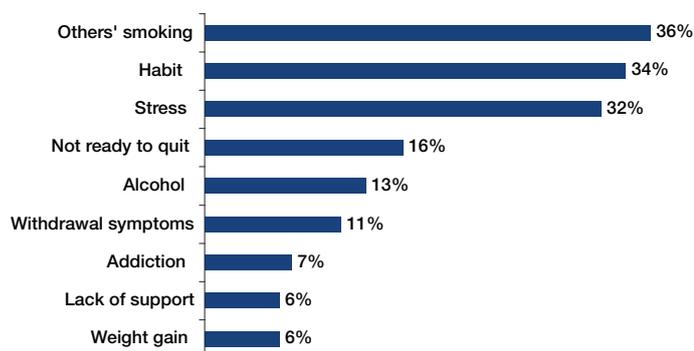
Others' smoking

Over one-third (36%) of respondents who had quit or tried quitting said that others' smoking, or smoking in the environment made quitting difficult (see Figure 1). Respondents who were more likely to say this were:

- Around three in five (61%) 15 to 24-year-olds, compared with around one in four (26%) 35 to 54-year-olds, and around one in five (17%) of those aged 55 years and over.
- Around one in two (48%) women compared with around one in four (24%) men.
- There were no differences by ethnicity, quit status, or neighbourhood deprivation status.

What makes quitting difficult? (continued)

Figure 1. Things that make quitting difficult



Habit

Around one-third (34%) of respondents who had quit or tried quitting said that the habit of smoking made quitting difficult. Respondents who were more likely to say this were:

- Around two in five (39%) non-Māori, compared with one in five (17%) Māori.

- Around one in two (48%) of those aged 55 years and over, compared with around one in five (21%) 15 to 24-year-olds.
- There were no differences by quit status, neighborhood deprivation status, or gender.

Stress

Around one-third (32%) of respondents who had quit or tried quitting said that a stressful event, or stressful events made quitting difficult. Respondents who were more likely to say this were:

- Around two in five (45%) women, compared with one in five (20%) men.
- There were no differences by ethnicity, quit status, neighbourhood deprivation status, or age

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.
- 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.

Citation

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