

## Young people's exposure to onscreen smoking

### Background

In 2012, the U.S. Surgeon General concluded that young people's exposure to smoking depictions in movies can cause smoking initiation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). There were a total of 2,818 'tobacco incidents'<sup>1</sup> in the top-grossing movies of 2012 in the United States, and the rate of tobacco incidents per youth-rated movie doubled between 2010 and 2012 (Polansky, Titus, Lanning, & Glantz, 2013). Children in New Zealand are even more likely than those in the United States to be exposed to smoking in movies, because classification differences between the two countries mean movies are less likely to receive a restricted classification in New Zealand (Maubach, Hoek, Edwards, Crane, & McCool, 2013).

One of the key sources 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 frequency of movie viewing and whether depictions of onscreen smoking affect perceptions of smoking.

### Methodology

Participants in the 2012 YIS were asked how often they watched movies and movies that are R-rated, as well as whether any smoking they had seen on TV, movies or the internet in the past month made smoking seem more or less attractive to them. Responses were examined by smoking status (those who had never smoked, compared with current smokers [smoked at least monthly] and ex [no longer smoked] or experimental [smoked less often than monthly] smokers), susceptibility to smoking (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], compared with susceptible never smokers), ethnicity, and gender. When looking at the differences by ethnicity and gender we have controlled for smoking status. This means that we take to account whether or not a respondent smokes, to ensure that any differences found are not in fact due to the respondent's own smoking status. Only those group

differences which were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) are reported.

Further analyses were undertaken to examine changes over time in frequency of movie and R-rated movie viewing as these questions were also asked in 2010.

### How often do young people watch movies and R-rated movies?

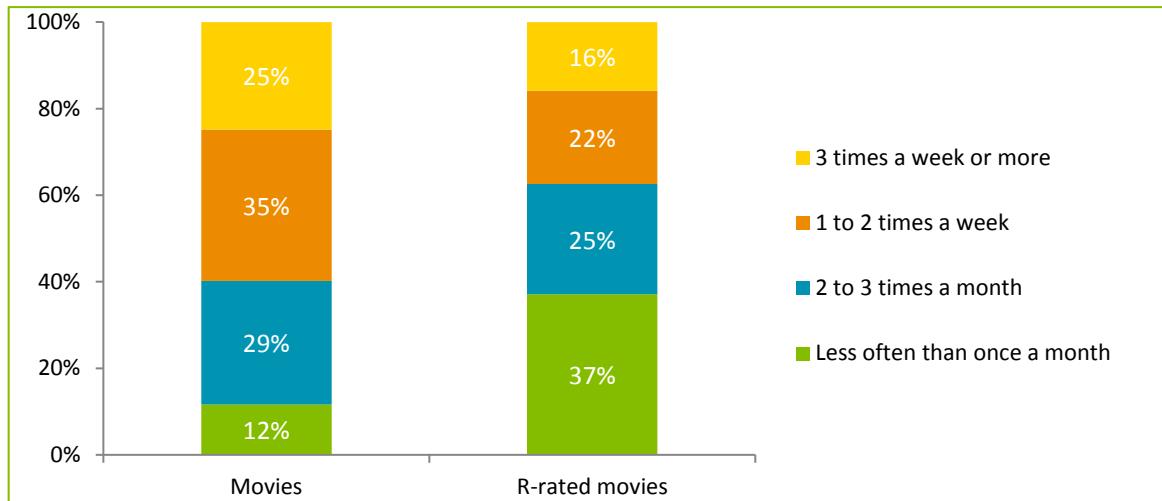
Participants were asked 'How often do you watch movies?' and 'How often do you watch movies that are R-rated (e.g. R16, R18)?'. Response options were '3 times a week or more', '1-2 times a week', '2-3 times a month', and 'less often than once a month'. Sixty percent (58-62%) watched movies and 37% (35-40%) watched R-rated movies at least once a week (Figure 1).

There were several sub-group differences in the frequency of watching movies and R-rated movies.

- Those more likely to watch movies at least once a week were:
  - Current smokers (80%), compared with ex/experimental smokers (71%), and both current and ex/experimental smokers compared with never smokers (54%).
  - Māori (75%), compared with non-Māori (55%).
- Those more likely to watch R-rated movies at least once a week were:
  - Current smokers (75%), compared with ex/experimental smokers (55%), and both current and ex/experimental smokers compared with never smokers (27%).
  - Māori (56%), compared with non-Māori (32%).
  - Males (45%), compared with females (30%).
- There were no differences in weekly viewing by smoking susceptibility, however susceptible never smokers (74%) were more likely than non-susceptible never smokers (50%) to watch R-rated movies at least once a month.

<sup>1</sup> Use or implied use of a tobacco product by an actor.

**Figure 1: Young People's frequency of watching movies and R-rated movies**



Note: Due to rounding, in some cases the proportions add to 100±1

There were no significant differences between 2012 and 2010 in the frequency that young people watched movies and R-rated movies, for any of the response categories.

## Does exposure to onscreen smoking affect young people's perceptions of smoking?

Participants were asked 'In the past 30 days (one month), if you have seen smoking in any TV programmes, movies or on the internet, did this make smoking seem more attractive, less attractive, or about the same?'. Only 15% (14-17%) of students said they had **not** seen any onscreen smoking in the past 30 days. Never smokers (18%) were more likely to say they had not seen any onscreen smoking than ex/experimental smokers (11%), and both were more likely to say this than current smokers (5%).

Of those who **had** seen onscreen smoking, 7% (6-9%) said it made smoking seem 'more attractive', 38% (36-40%) said it made smoking seem 'less attractive', 30% (28-32%) said it made smoking seem 'about the same', and 24% (22-26%) did not know. There were several sub-group differences in how perceptions of smoking changed as a result of seeing onscreen smoking:

- Current smokers (16%) were more likely than ex/experimental smokers (8%) and those who had never smoked (6%) to say that seeing onscreen smoking made smoking seem **more** attractive.
- Never smokers (44%) were more likely than ex/experimental smokers (34%), and both were more likely than current smokers (12%), to say that seeing onscreen smoking made smoking seem **less** attractive.
- Non-susceptible never smokers (47%) were more likely than susceptible never smokers (31%) to say that seeing onscreen smoking made smoking seem **less** attractive.

## Key points

- Almost two-thirds of young people watch movies at least once a week, and more than one-in-three watch R-rated movies at least once a week.
- Those most likely to frequently watch movies and R-rated movies were current smokers and students of Māori ethnicity. Among those who had never smoked, susceptible never-smokers more frequently watched R-rated movies than non-susceptible never-smokers.
- Of those young people who had seen onscreen depictions of smoking in the past month, a small minority (7%) thought this made smoking seem more attractive. Current smokers were more likely to think this than those who infrequently/no longer or never smoked.

## 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, and media use, and responses to tobacco control initiatives. It monitors the 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  $\alpha=.05$ .
- 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. HPA also enables environments that support health and wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, and reduce personal, social and economic harm.

## References

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