New Zealand smokers' attitudes to smokefree cars containing preschool children: Very high support across all sociodemographic groups

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Abstract
In 2008 we published the overall support by New Zealand smokers for smokefree cars containing preschool children (96%).1 To provide further detail on the support by different groups, we examined the support by age-groups, gender, ethnicity, level of socioeconomic deprivation, and level of financial stress. The data came from the wave 1 of the New Zealand arm of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey (NZ ITC Project). This wave involved surveying a national sample of 1376 New Zealand adult (18+ years) smokers in 2007–2008. We asked: Do you think smoking should be allowed in cars with preschool children in them? Further detail on the survey methods is available elsewhere.2 We found that smokers in all age-groups, both men and women, those in the four ethnic groups considered, and those in all small area deprivation quintiles, disagreed with the statement at a level of 92%+ (Table 1). Of those smokers who reported suffering from two different types of smoking-related financial stress (those unable to pay any important bills on time due to a shortage of money, and those not spending on household essentials due to spending on smoking) over 92% also disagreed (see Table 1). The key finding is that New Zealand smokers from different socio-demographic groups appear to give very high support for not allowing smoking in cars carrying preschool children. These data are further supported by results from a 2008 national survey of the New Zealand public, which found 91% (82% for smokers) agreeing with the statement ‘that smoking should not be allowed in cars with children under the age of 14 in them’.3 These results indicate that there is strong support across a very wide range of smokers (and from the public) for active government intervention to protect New Zealand children from tobacco smoke pollution in cars. We need to consider why New Zealand is lagging behind 11 states and provinces in Australia, Canada, and the USA, which have all passed laws to protect their children from smoking in cars.4 While further social marketing campaigns on this theme are desirable, we suggest that smokefree car legislation is an appropriate use of the law, and would provide a strong signal on the priority of child protection from tobacco smoke. If the New Zealand Parliament is going to consider banning cell phone use while car driving, they could consider smokefree cars at the same time.

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