

Smoker interest in lower harm alternatives to cigarettes: National survey data

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Abstract

Introduction: The aim of this study was to examine knowledge and attitudes to lower harm alternatives to cigarettes among New Zealand (NZ) smokers.

Methods: The NZ arm of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey (ITC Project) utilizes the NZ Health Survey (a national sample). From this sample, we surveyed adult smokers ($N = 1,376$).

Results: Knowledge about smokeless tobacco was poor, with only 16% regarding such products as less harmful than ordinary cigarettes. Only 7% considered such products to be “ a lot less ” harmful. When participants were asked to assume that these products were much less harmful than cigarettes, 34% of smokers stated that they would be interested in trying smokeless tobacco products, with another 11% saying “ maybe ” or “ don ’ t know. ” In the multivariate analysis, Māori smokers were significantly more interested in trying smokeless products than Europeans in all 3 models considered (e.g., Model 1: adjusted odds ratio [AOR] = 1.71, 95% CI = 1.23 – 2.37). There was also significantly increased interest for those concerned about the impact of smoking on health and quality of life in the future (AOR = 1.44, 95% CI = 1.17 – 1.78). But interest did not vary significantly by 2 measures of socioeconomic status and varied inconsistently by 2 measures of financial stress.

Discussion: The finding that one third of smokers said that they would be interested in trying smokeless products suggests that these products could have a role as part of a tobacco epidemic endgame that phases out smoked tobacco. Differences in interest level by ethnic group may be relevant to stimulating further work in this area (e.g., among those health workers concerned for smokers with the highest need to quit).

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