

# Poorer mental health in many New Zealand smokers: National survey data from the ITC Project

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## Abstract

There is international evidence that smoking and poorer mental health are associated.<sup>1–5</sup> This association has also been studied in New Zealand (e.g., in longitudinal studies<sup>6–8</sup>) with the most recent work indicating that smoking has a causal role in depressive symptoms.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in this country it has been estimated that 33% of all cigarettes are consumed by people with current mental disorders.<sup>10</sup> We were able to further explore some aspects of the smoking and mental health issue in New Zealand as part of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey (ITC Project).

**Methods**—The ITC Project (NZ arm) surveyed a nationally representative sample of adult smokers ( $n=1376$  in Wave 1 in 2007/8,  $n=923$  in Wave 2 in 2008/9). This study derives its sample from the New Zealand Health Survey (NZHS) which is a national sample with boosted sampling of Māori, Pacific and Asian New Zealanders. We measured their mental health and alcohol use status using the SF-36, the Kessler-10 (K10), and the AUDIT. Also assessed were smoking-related beliefs and behaviours, including quit rates. Some comparisons were made with non-smoking participants in the NZHS. All results are weighted and adjusted for the complex sample design. Further details of the methods (including response rates, attrition and weighting processes) are available in online Methods Reports<sup>11–13</sup> and related publications.<sup>14 15</sup>

**Results**—In terms of overall mental health, smokers had significantly lower SF-36 (mental health) scores (i.e., poorer mental health status) than the general adult population (80.6, 95%CI: 79.6–81.6; vs 82.2, 95%CI: 81.9–82.6). Reporting ever having been diagnosed with a mental disorder was significantly more common for adult smokers than for non-smokers (at 20.3%, 95%CI: 17.4% – 23.1%; vs 11.5%, 95%CI: 10.8%–12.2%). Here the non-smoker comparison group was from the full NZHS sample and “mental disorders” were any in a list of eight items used in the NZHS.

## Recommended Citation

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<http://www.networknorth.org.nz/file/Smokefree/mental-health-of-nz-smokers-itc-project.pdf>