

Prevalence, Correlates of, and Reasons for Using Roll-Your-Own Tobacco in a High RYO Use Country: Findings from the ITC New Zealand Survey

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Abstract

Aim: To describe the prevalence, correlates of, and reasons for use of roll-your-own (RYO) tobacco in a high RYO use and ethnically diverse country: New Zealand (NZ).

Methods: The NZ arm of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey (ITC Project) is sampled from the New Zealand Health Survey, with boosted sampling of Māori, Pacific peoples, and Asian New Zealanders. We surveyed 1,376 current adult smokers using standard ITC project procedures in 2007–2008.

Results: Prevalence of regularly smoking RYOs was 53% (with 38% of all smokers being exclusive RYO smokers). RYO use was higher among disadvantaged smokers, heavier smokers, those with a relatively low intention of quitting, and those with more friends who smoke. RYO use increased more in the youngest age groups as disadvantage increased. “Lower price” dominated the reasons smokers’ cited for smoking RYOs (at 83%). About one fifth cited “less health concerns” as a reason.

Conclusions: RYO smoking is particularly associated with individual deprivation and high levels of dependence. Its capacity to blunt price signals provided by tobacco taxes is accompanied by misperceptions that it is less hazardous to health and it is particularly prevalent among vulnerable disadvantaged populations (including Māori, young people, and those with mental health problems). Governments should reconsider removing any tax advantages given to RYO tobacco, ensure RYO smokers are properly informed of health risks, and supported to quit as strongly as other smokers. However, governments should also examine a broader range of options including a higher differential tax on RYO tobacco, removing flavors, and controlling all tobacco marketing.

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