

Characterising smokers of menthol and flavoured cigarettes, their attitudes towards tobacco regulation, and the anticipated impact of the Tobacco Products Directive on their smoking and quitting behaviours: The EUREST-PLUS ITC Europe Surveys

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Abstract

Introduction: Little research exists on the sociodemographic characteristics of menthol and flavoured cigarette (MFC) smokers in Europe. This study assessed the proportion of MFC smokers in Europe, their sociodemographic characteristics, and their attitudes towards tobacco control measures.

Methods: Cross-sectional data were collected in 2016 among 10760 adult current smokers from 8 European countries (ITC Europe Project and EUREST-PLUS). Smokers of menthol, other flavoured, unflavoured tobacco, or no usual brand were compared on sociodemographic characteristics, attitudes towards a range of tobacco control measures (e.g. ban on flavouring), and on intentions regarding their smoking behaviour following the ban on flavoured tobacco. Data were analysed in SPSS Complex Samples Package using univariate analyses.

Results: Among the respondents, 7.4% smoked menthol cigarettes and 2.9% other flavoured tobacco, but large differences existed between countries (e.g. 0.4% smokers smoked menthol cigarettes in Spain vs 12.4% in England). Compared to other groups, menthol cigarette smokers were younger, more likely to be female, better educated, had higher household income, and smoked fewer cigarettes (all $p < 0.001$). A quarter of menthol smokers supported a ban on additives, compared with almost half of all other smokers ($p < 0.001$). In case of a ban on flavourings, around a fifth of all MFC smokers intended to switch to another brand, and a third to reduce the amount they smoked or to quit smoking, but there was no consistent pattern across MFC smokers among the countries.

Conclusions: The ban on flavourings introduced by the EU Tobacco Products Directive (extended to 2020 for menthols) will affect one in ten smokers in the countries surveyed, which provides an opportunity for targeting these groups with cessation programmes. However, smokers of menthol and flavoured cigarettes in the different European countries are a heterogeneous group and may need different approaches.

Recommended Citation

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