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GF has served as an expert witness or consultant for governments defending their country's policies or regulations in litigation and has served as paid expert consultant to the Ministry of Health of Singapore in reviewing the evidence of plain/standardized packaging. All other authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Capsule and menthol cigarette use in Aotearoa New Zealand:

Findings from the ITC NZ (EASE) 2020-21 survey



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BACKGROUND

- Aotearoa New Zealand has a Smokefree Aotearoa goal to reduce smoking prevalence to less than 5% for all peoples by 2025.
- Daily smoking prevalence in 2021/22 was 8%, but was substantially higher among Māori (the Indigenous peoples) (20%) and Pacific peoples (18%).
- Menthol flavoured cigarettes and tobacco and crushable capsule cigarettes that release flavours may increase the appeal of smoking particularly among some demographic groups.

OBJECTIVE

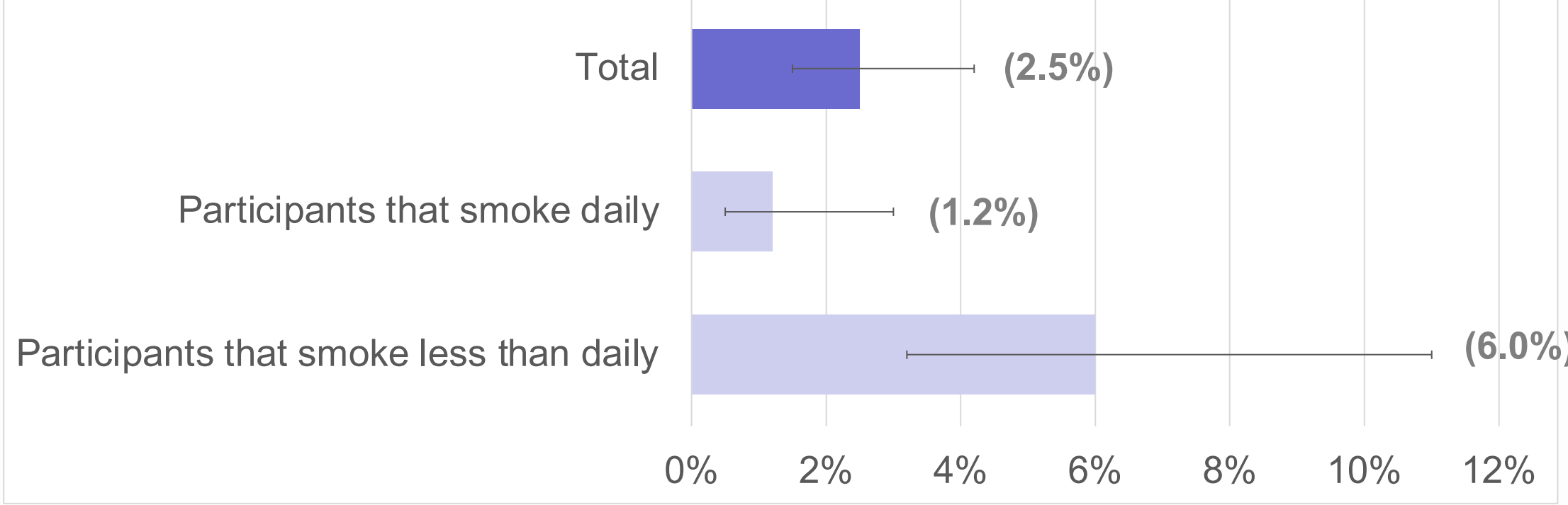
- To determine prevalence of capsule and menthol cigarette or tobacco use among people who smoke in Aotearoa New Zealand and examine how this varies by frequency of smoking and by sex, age and ethnicity.

METHODS

- Data were from Wave 3 of the ITC NZ (EASE) study, conducted online (Oct 2020-Feb 2021).
- Participants included 992 people who smoked (700 people who smoked daily and 292 people who smoked less than daily; 406 Māori and 156 Pacific peoples).
- Estimates were weighted to reflect Aotearoa New Zealand's population of current smokers, including weighting for age, sex, and ethnicity.
- “Don't know” and “Refused” responses were excluded.

RESULTS

2.5% of participants who smoked used capsule cigarettes



- Use was higher in participants who smoked less than daily, compared with participants who smoked daily.
- Use did not differ greatly by sex.
- Use trended towards being higher in people aged under 25 years (18-24 years: 3.6% (95% CI 1.6-7.9%), 25-44 years: 2.1% (95% CI 1.0-4.5%), 45 years and over: 2.5% (95% CI 1.0-6.5%)).
- Use trended towards being higher in Pacific peoples (Pacific: 3.9% (95% CI: 1.5-9.8%), Māori 1.7% (95% CI 0.8-3.5%), Non-Māori, non-Pacific: 2.6% (1.2-5.5%)).

Bars on the graph represent 95% confidence intervals.

18.3%

of participants who smoked used menthol cigarettes or tobacco*

(95% CI 15.5-21.5%)

- Use did not differ greatly by sex, or frequency of smoking (daily vs less than daily).
- Use trended towards being lower in people aged under 25 years (18-24 years: 12.8% (95% CI 8.9-18.2%), 25-44 years: 21.1% (95% CI 16.8-26.2%), 45 years and over: 17.5% (95% CI 13.0-23.1%)).
- Use trended towards being higher in Pacific peoples (Pacific: 28.4% (95% CI: 20.7-37.7%), Māori 17.0% (95% CI 13.3-21.4%), Non-Māori, non-Pacific: 16.0% (12.1-20.7%)).

*Menthol use includes use with or without capsules.

12% of participants who used menthol cigarettes stated they chose their current brand of cigarettes/tobacco because it might be less bad for their health. The corresponding value for participants who did not use menthol cigarettes was 6%.

CONCLUSIONS

- To achieve goals like Smokefree Aotearoa 2025, it is logical that smoked tobacco products should be regulated to minimise their appeal.
- The ability to restrict constituents and design features that increase tobacco product appeal was included in Smokefree legislation passed in December 2022 by the Aotearoa New Zealand Parliament.
- These findings underline the potential importance of prohibiting capsules and/or menthol flavouring to help reduce smoking prevalence and achieve the Smokefree goal.



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