

Smokers' Support For More Tobacco Product Regulation And Government Action On Tobacco Control: National Survey Data From New Zealand

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Background

Smoking in New Zealand (NZ) is highly socially patterned with much higher prevalences among Māori (the indigenous people of NZ), Pacific peoples and among lower socio-economic (SES) groups.

Previous research has shown strong support for further tobacco product regulation and government action on tobacco control among both smokers and non-smokers.

Aim

To determine smokers' support for tobacco advertising restrictions, tobacco product regulation and additional government action for tobacco control in New Zealand.

Methods

Subjects were participants in the first wave of the NZ arm of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey (ITC Project).

The NZ ITC cohort is derived from a nationally representative Health Survey (NZHS), which included booster sampling of Māori (indigenous New Zealanders) and Pacific people and Asian ethnic groups.

For wave one, 1376 smokers from the NZHS aged 18+ took part in phone interviews between March 2007 to February 2008.

We asked subjects about whether tobacco products should be more tightly regulated, whether the government should do more to tackle the harm caused by smoking, and whether tobacco companies should be allowed to advertise and promote cigarettes as they please.

Socio-economic status was measured using a standard area-based SES score (NZDep) and subjects categorised into quintiles of deprivation.

We also used a measure of 'smoking-induced deprivation' defined as present for subjects who had deferred spending on household items to buy cigarettes in the last 6 months.

Results were weighted to reflect the national population of smokers and the complex sample design.

Further details on the survey methods are available elsewhere (Methods Report: <http://www.wnmeds.ac.nz/itcproject.html>).

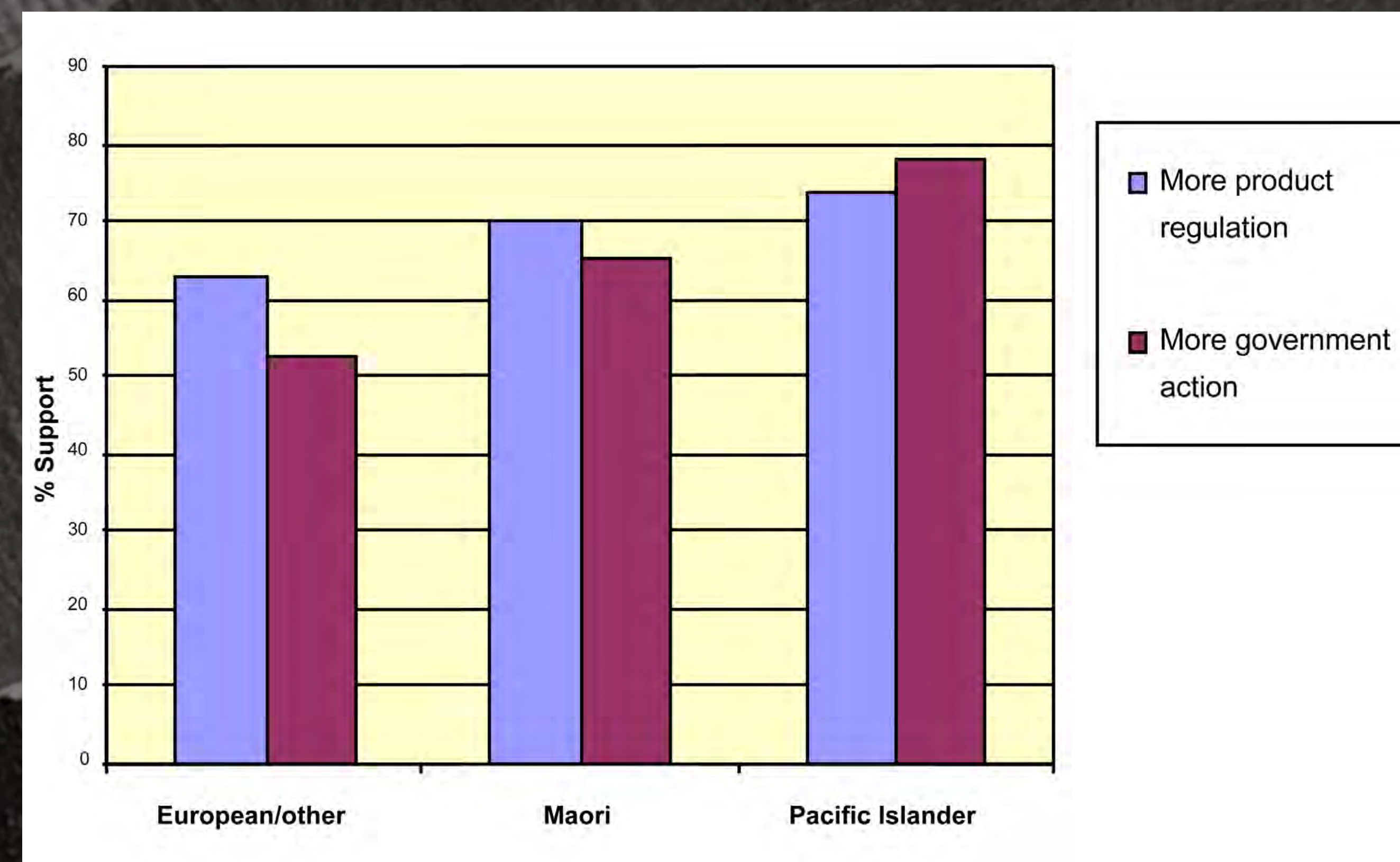


Figure 1: Support for tobacco product regulation and more government action on tobacco control by ethnicity

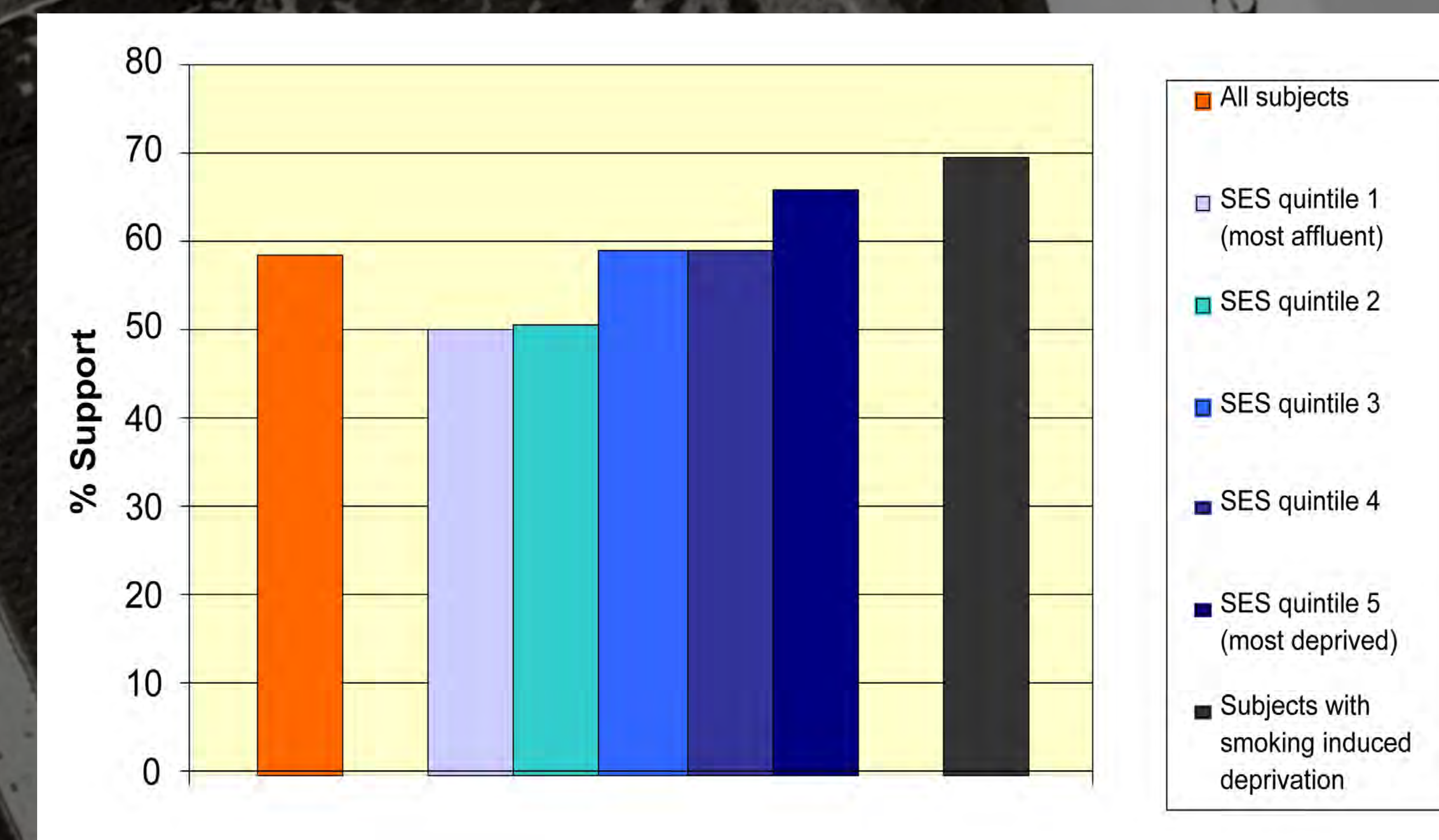


Figure 2: Support for more government action by socio-economic status

Results

1. Product regulation: Most (65%) smokers agreed that tobacco products should be more tightly regulated.

- Māori (odds ratio [OR]=1.41 95% CI 1.04 to 1.91) and Pacific people (OR=1.68 95% CI 0.92 to 3.04) smokers were more likely than European/other smokers to support tighter regulation.
- Smokers with smoking induced deprivation were more likely to support tobacco regulation (OR = 2.01 95% CI 1.39 to 2.90). Otherwise there were no clear differences in support by SES.

2. Government action: Most (59%) smokers supported greater government action on tobacco control.

- Māori (OR=1.71 95% CI 1.28 to 2.30) and Pacific people (OR=3.19 95% CI 1.71 to 5.95) smokers were more likely to support tighter regulation of tobacco products than European/other smokers.
- Smokers from lower SES groups (OR=1.93 95% CI 1.14 to 3.26 for most deprived quintile compared to least deprived) and those with smoking induced deprivation (OR= 1.87 95% CI 1.32 to 2.66) were more likely to support tighter regulation of tobacco products (figure 2).

3. Regulation of cigarette marketing: Most (69%) smokers disagreed that tobacco companies should be allowed to advertise and promote cigarettes as they please.

- Views on tobacco advertising differed little by ethnicity or SES.

Discussion

The majority support for greater product regulation and more government action on tobacco control indicates that policymakers have smoker support for relevant change.

Support for increased regulation and government tobacco control action came particularly from groups who have been regarded by many policymakers as resistant to change – e.g. Māori and Pacific smokers.

Support was particularly strong among smokers who were suffering smoking induced deprivation and were of lower SES (greater government action).

The international implications include that researchers and policymakers may find it worthwhile to investigate and consider whether those social groups most impacted by smoking may provide the most support for change.

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