

Perceptions of illicit tobacco trade following large reductions in tobacco retail outlets:

A qualitative analysis of New Zealanders who smoke

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Research for a tobacco free future

Disclosures

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Te Kāhui Matepukupuku O Aotearoa
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- No off-label medication uses are discussed



**Cancer
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o Aotearoa

Background

- Aotearoa New Zealand proposes greatly reducing tobacco availability
 - Tobacco **not** a normal consumer product
- Recognises wide availability facilitates uptake and may undermine quitting
- Builds on work undertaken in other jurisdictions



WHICH ITEM DOESN'T BELONG?

Some retailers are choosing to no longer sell tobacco products. They realise tobacco does not support the health of their customers and community.

Ask your local retailer to stop selling tobacco products
www.smokefreesshops.co.nz



Retail reduction measures

Local measures

- Beverley Hills and Manhattan Beach (US) ended sale of tobacco products
- San Francisco limited tobacco retail permits granted

National measures

- Hungary legislated substantial outlet reductions
- Netherlands has ended sales from vending machines, will stop online sales (2023), end supermarket sales (2024); phase out other outlets (2030)
- Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) reducing outlets from ~6000 stores to 600

Industry opposition

- TI argued supply reduction will:
 - Stimulate illicit tobacco markets
 - Lead to criminal activity
 - Stretch limited police resources
- Analyses of industry evidence found many flaws

BUT

- Illicit tobacco trade narrative often piques media interest and gains political traction



Evidence of illicit trade

- Analysis 2013 NZ Customs data estimated illicit products 1.8% to 3.9% national consumption
- Discarded pack studies
 - 2009 analysis found estimated illicit consumption at 3.2%
 - 2012/13 replication estimated illicit consumption 5.8%
 - Lockdown study estimated national prevalence of foreign packs 5.4%



Research question

Aim: To explore knowledge and experience of illicit tobacco market, and anticipated future use of illicit tobacco

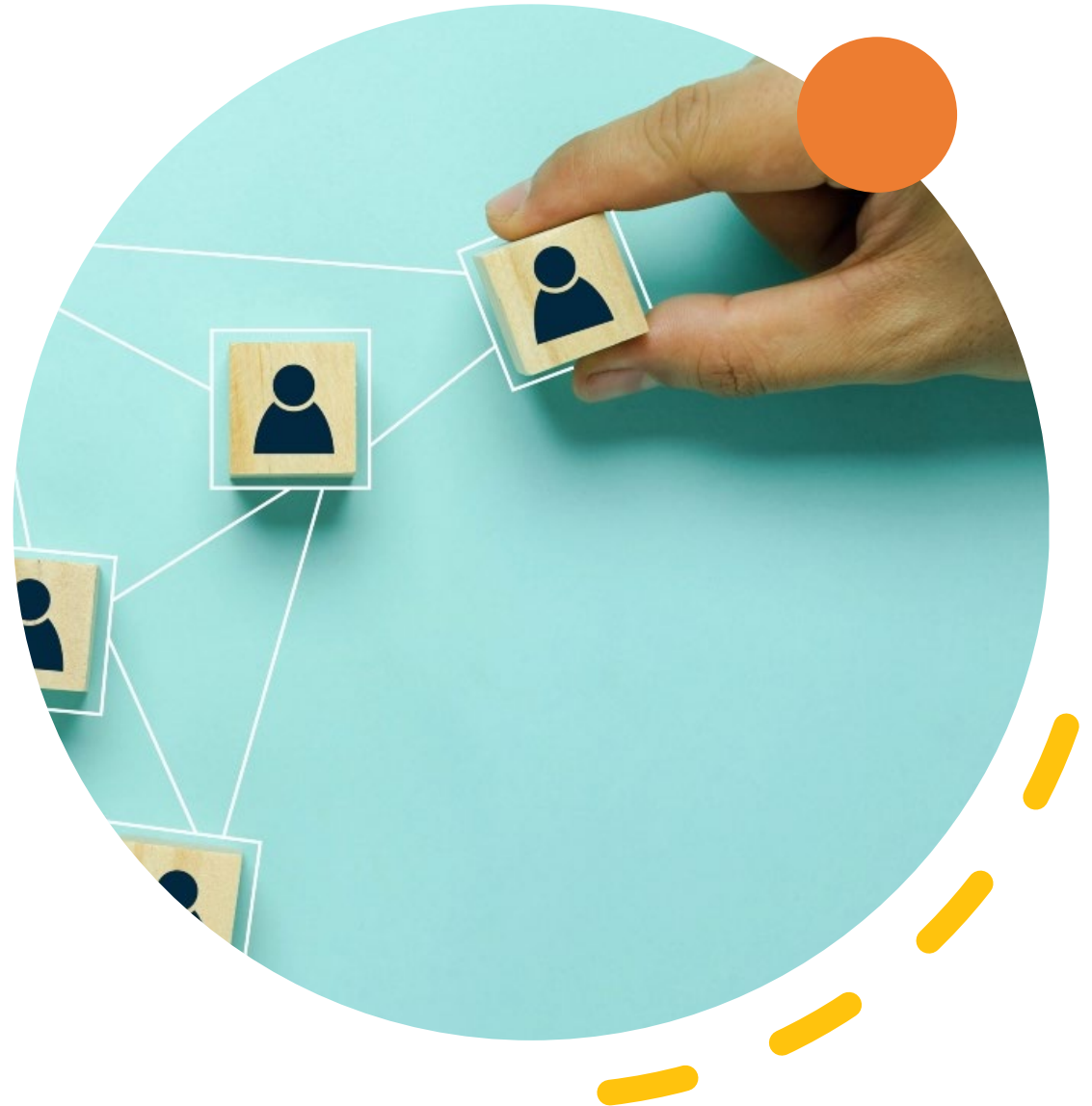
- What impact retail reduction strategy would have on anticipated illicit tobacco use?
 - What experiences participants had of illicit tobacco?
 - What use of illicit tobacco did they expect to have, post-implementation?
 - What wider impacts could illicit tobacco trade create?
 - What interventions could reduce illicit tobacco supply?



Methods

Sample

- Recruitment via social media and referrals
- Eligibility:
 - Aged 18 or older
 - Smoked at least five cigarettes a day
- Recruitment primarily from Dunedin (Otepoti) and Hamilton (Kirikiriroa)





Methods

Interviews

- Explored smoking history
- Addressed RQs

- 24 interviews
 - Lasted between 37 and 119 minutes

- Project received low risk ethics approval

- Indigenous advisors

Results: Limited experience

WOM and social networks key route to traders

“somebody had told me that somebody was selling cigarettes [a contraband Chinese brand] for \$20 a packet so I started going there for a little bit...then I hear they got busted, so, I wasn’t able to go there”. “I was only buying from him for like two months... every second week... really just if I needed to save the money, otherwise... I had no problem spending another \$10 on a pack.”

“my circles include those of us who are living day to day... I’m rapt when those young fellas come round [because] that’s actually like saving money”.



Results: Limited knowledge and experience

- Home grown tobacco
 - *“disgusting”, “feral”, “foul” and “rubbish”*
- A stop-gap measure not a long term alternative
 - *“my dad and I have already discussed it... he’s, like, 40 years a smoker... he lives in [small town] so I couldn’t imagine there’ll be tobacco outlets there... our next option [would be] to grow our own... I don’t enjoy the taste of grow-your-own tobacco; it would lead to me actually giving up”.*



Results: Limited knowledge and experience

Several concerns over quality


- *“a quality issue...if it’s a black market, there’s no regulation on what strength it is or how it tastes”.*

Particularly held re home-grown tobacco

- *“I know we don’t know what’s going into our tobacco right now, but it’s not as bad as what people can mix it with when they grow their own and sell it. It’s quite a scary game”.*



HIGH RISK



Results: Complex supply networks

Views on market differed

“that market is very like, it’s not easy to get into... once you do have the contact, yep, you get into it, otherwise, no...”

“You’ll probably get a lot of schemers... up and coming entrepreneurs”

Results: Complex supply networks

Views on pricing varied:

“People from the suburbs cannot get to those [designated tobacco stores]... it’s gonna cause a black market to grow and someone’s gonna get rich out of it... just ripping people off, but if people are desperate, they’ll pay that money”.

“Everybody stocking up on stuff and I feel like that’s probably going to happen... the word will get around, you know, blah blah blah has got some cigarettes... and then I’m gonna come get some cigarettes cheap.”



Results: Complex supply networks

Smoking could become too problematic

“I couldn’t be bothered going through [a] black market to buy tobacco; I’d rather just quit and be done with it... say nah, I’m done, I’m over it.”

I'M



THIS

Results: Increasing marginalisation

Wider implications for public safety:

- Personal safety
 - *“If someone's walking down the street with a cigarette, people might take their handbag or whatever”*
- Opportunistic crime
 - *“young people... they'll see a pack of smokes in a car and they['ll] end up breaking into it. You know, it's just, it's just, [the proposed retail policy] not going to help anyone.”*
- Gang power
 - *“it will cause the gangs to take over everything now...I truly do think that will probably happen.”*

Results: Increasing marginalisation

Views on store safety varied:

“So perhaps the risk of it [the store selling tobacco] being targeted is much higher because you’re taking the risk from all of those little places into one place”.

“if cigarettes weren’t in the shops, they wouldn’t be ram raiding... it’s a lot bigger thing to ram raid a [expletive] Pak’n’Save [supermarket] than smaller town outlets... having bollards in place obviously does deter that sort of thing.”



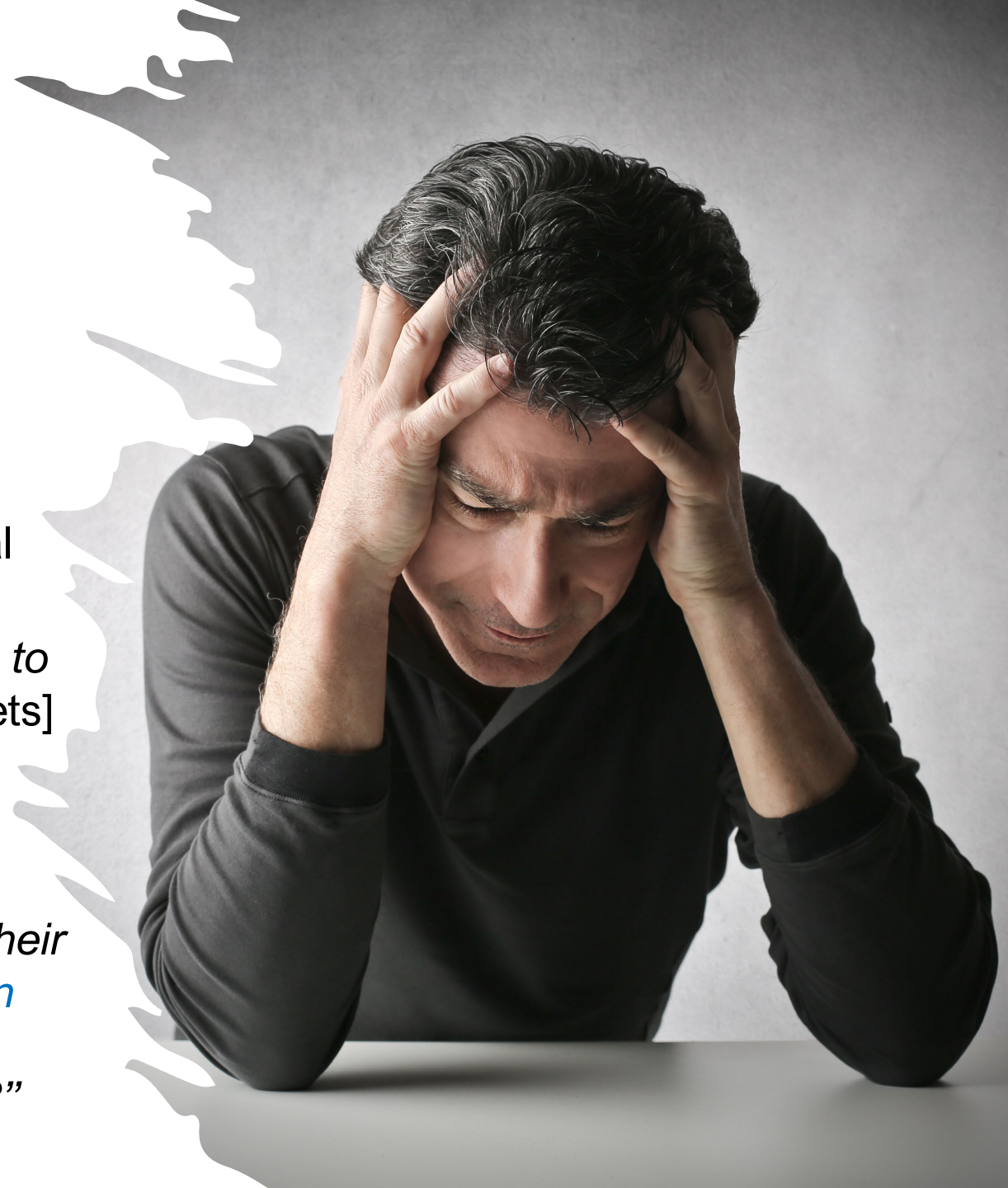
Results: Specific and societal solutions

Most common proposed solution to illicit trade

- *“just leaving people be”*

Minority viewed illicit trade indication of societal problems

- *“why is this happening? They’ve been driven to it... do you think this [ram raids on retail outlets] would really be happening if they weren’t already starving?”*
- *“they’re not trying to attack their parents or their grandmother... it’s not something personal, in their mind... if you’re thieving at a corporate level like that, really, it’s all written off, isn’t it?”*



Discussion

Responses characterised by uncertainty

- Anticipated increased illicit tobacco use, but among “others”
- Expected safety to decrease, but also to increase
- Thought illicit trade would both increase and decrease prices
- Found prospect of lower prices appealing, but unclear if these offset quality concerns
- Unclear how policy implementation should occur



Implications

- A gap between industry narrative and lived experiences
- Uncertainty about illicit market
- Could the threat be over-stated?
- A political rather than empirical strategy to deter novel policies?

Best response

- Reduce appeal of market by decreasing its size



Questions

MS now in press at NTR:
10.1093/ntr/ntad034

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