ITC NETHERLANDS SURVEY: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This summary presents key findings from Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the ITC Netherlands Survey – a telephone and web-based survey of a nationally representative sample of 2224 smokers. The summary highlights attitudes and behaviors of smokers before and after implementation of the smoke-free law in the hospitality industry, a 50 Eurocent tax increase on cigarettes, and a mass media smoking cessation campaign. Responses to these initiatives are evaluated through the Wave 2 Survey – a “reduced-wave” survey of 643 young adults and adults from the Wave 1 internet survey cohort conducted 7 months after Wave 1. Wave 3, conducted in March to April 2009, will provide a more comprehensive evaluation of these policies among the full Wave 1 cohort. The ITC Netherlands Survey is intended to assist policymakers in implementing effective tobacco control policies in the Netherlands. Detailed results of the ITC Netherlands Surveys are available at www.itcproject.org.

ITC Netherlands Survey

Survey Mode: Internet survey (Wave 1 and Wave 2) and telephone survey (Wave 1 only)

Survey Sample – Wave 1: 1820 young adult (age 15+) and adult (age 18+) smokers randomly selected from nationally representative internet panel and 404 adult smokers randomly selected from nationally representative telephone database

Survey Sample – Wave 2: 643 young adult and adult smokers randomly selected from Wave 1 internet survey sample

Wave 1 Survey Dates: March – April 2008
Wave 2 Survey Dates: November – December 2008

Objective: To create a system for comprehensive surveillance and evaluation of tobacco control initiatives in the Netherlands, including 1) the July 1, 2008 ban on smoking in bars, restaurants, and sportcanteens, and a mass media information campaign on these measures, 2) the July 1, 2008 tax increase of €0.50, 3) a wide-scale mass media smoking cessation campaign that was launched before and after the ban.

Dutch smokers have a high prevalence of roll-your-own use

Consumption of both cigarettes and other tobacco products in the Netherlands has steadily declined since 1995, when the smoking prevalence was 35%. In 2008, the smoking prevalence was 27% (30% of males and 24% of females).

The ITC Survey found that 93% of Dutch smokers are daily smokers. The average number of cigarettes smoked per day among daily smokers is 16.6. Compared to other ITC countries surveyed, Dutch smokers have a low prevalence of manufactured cigarette smoking (46%). One-third (32%) of Dutch smokers smoke roll-your-own cigarettes exclusively – the third highest rate among all ITC countries (SEE SIDEBAR). An additional 22% of smokers smoke both factory-made and roll-your-own cigarettes.

Half of Dutch smokers say price is a reason to quit

Before the smoking ban, three-quarters (75%) of Dutch smokers had tried to quit smoking. One-quarter (24%) of smokers indicated that they plan to quit within the next six months. A further 57% reported that they plan to quit sometime in the future. Only 15% were not planning to quit smoking. One-third (34%) of smokers “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the government should do more to help smokers quit.

At Wave 2, 9% of smokers had quit and 38% had made a ‘serious’ quit attempt since the last survey. About 9% of smokers stated that they plan to quit sometime in the future. Only 15% were not planning to quit smoking. One-third (34%) of smokers “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the government should do more to help smokers quit.

On July 1, 2008, the price of a package of cigarettes increased by 50 Eurocents. Five months after the tax increase, more than half of smokers (57%) said that the price of cigarettes was “somewhat” or “very much” a reason to quit smoking, an increase of 4%. One quarter (25%) of smokers said that they think “often” or “very often” about the money spent on cigarettes in the last month, an increase of 4%. About 19% of smokers said that they spent money on cigarettes that would have been better spent on food, an increase of 2%.

What is the ITC Project?

The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (the ITC Project) is the first-ever international cohort study of tobacco use. It is designed to evaluate the impact of policies implemented under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Each ITC Survey follows standardized protocols and includes rigorous measures to assess the impact and identify the determinants of effective tobacco control policies in the following areas:

- health warning labels and package descriptors
- smoke-free legislation
- pricing and taxation of tobacco products
- education and support for cessation
- tobacco advertising and promotion

ITC Survey findings will provide an evidence base to guide policies enacted under the FCTC, and to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of these legislative efforts.

1 Note that for greater comparability, Wave 1-Wave 2 comparisons are based on Wave 1 and Wave 2 frequencies for only the internet (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing - CAWI) survey sample. For all other Wave 1 results, total frequencies of the telephone (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview - CATI) and internet (CAWI) responses are reported. For international comparisons, Wave 1 telephone (CATI) and internet (CAWI) responses were reported only for those 18 years of age or older; this was done to improve comparability to all other ITC country surveys, which consisted of adult-only samples, defined by the same age criterion.


3 TNS NIPO (2009). Dutch Continuous Survey of Smoking Habits. Amsterdam: TNS NIPO.

Smoking has decreased dramatically in restaurants, less so in bars

The ITC Netherlands Survey shows that the July 1, 2008 smoking ban has been successful in restaurants: observed smoking decreased from 83% before the ban to 6% after the ban. But the ban has been less effective in bars. After the ban, observed smoking only decreased from 93% to 30%. This decrease is considerably less dramatic than that found after smoking bans in bars in other ITC Europe countries such as Ireland, Scotland and France where observed smoking in bars decreased from about 95% before the ban to between 1 and 8% after the ban. The Wave 3 Survey, conducted March to May 2009, will provide an important measure of whether smoking prevalence in bars continues downward to levels seen in other countries or whether it remains at the high levels seen at Wave 2.

Public support for the ban in restaurants increased from 33% before the ban to 46% after the ban, an increase of 13%. This increase in support, while encouraging, is lower than what has been experienced in other EU countries after their bans. The Netherlands is the only ITC Country that did not show an increase in public support for smoking bans in bars and pubs after their introduction. Before the ban, 20% of smokers supported or strongly supported the ban. After the ban, 16% of smokers supported or strongly supported the ban.

Smoking in the home has not increased

Consistent with findings of ITC surveys in other European countries, smoking in the home did not increase in the Netherlands after the ban. For the great majority of smokers (84%), the ban had no effect on their smoking habits at home. The prevalence of smoke-free home policies (never allowing smoking or only under certain circumstances) essentially remained unchanged from 25% before the ban to 24% after the ban. After the ban, 12% of smokers were more strict about the amount smoked at home. One-sixth (16%) of smokers indicated they were planning to make their home smoke-free, an increase of 3% from before the ban.

Text-based warning labels are not effective

Tobacco warning labels are not salient among Dutch smokers. Fewer than one-third (30%) of smokers notice warning labels on cigarette packages “often” or “very often”. Netherlands had the lowest level of noticing warning labels among the ITC Europe countries surveyed, which have had text warning labels on 30% of the front and 40% of the back of the package since September 2002 (EU Directive 2001/37/EC) and have not yet adopted a requirement for pictorial warning labels.

Implications for Tobacco Control in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has taken several steps to meet their FCTC obligations and improve public health; however, further actions are needed to increase compliance with smoke-free laws, to reduce the tax advantage for roll-your-owns, and to increase the effectiveness of warning labels. Recommendations for further tobacco control efforts are as follows:

- **Strengthen enforcement of the smoking ban in hospitality sector**: Guidelines for Article 8 promote strengthened and expanded efforts to achieve 100% smoke-free environments, including monitoring and evaluation of enforcement of legislation. International research on the impact of smoking bans in public places provides consistent evidence of public health benefits associated with reduced exposure to second-hand smoke and denormalization of tobacco.

- **Equate tax rate across factory-made and roll-your-own cigarettes**: Taxation is a very effective method of reducing tobacco use. The majority of roll-your-own smokers in the ITC Netherlands Survey reported that they smoke roll-your-own cigarettes because they are less expensive – a strong indicator that prices are too low. (SEE SIDEBAR)

- **Strengthen health warning labels**: Low levels of awareness of text warning labels indicate the need for measures to increase their prominence. Pictorial warning labels are effective in increasing awareness of the dangers of smoking and aiding in smoking cessation. Recent strong guidelines adopted for Article 11 of the FCTC on packaging and labeling of tobacco products call for pictorial warnings on at least 50% of the package. Warning labels in the Netherlands will have greater potential impact if pictorial warning labels are implemented.  

7 A recent report by VWA (the government agency that controls the ban) showed that 15% of bars and discotheques had installed a separate smoking room, therefore the existence of smoking rooms may partially explain the observed smoking. VWA (2009). Inventarisatie naleving rookwet, horeca. Vrienden van Wonen Autoriteit; http://www.vwa.nl/portals/page?pagid=119-165982&dad=portal&schema=PORTAL&news_item_id=23998


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