

# The health effects of smoking chop-chop (illicit tobacco)



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# Background

- Chop-chop = black-market tobacco
- ~ 8.6% of the Australian population (2004) has smoked chop-chop
- 'Home-grown' or diverted from farm crops
- estimated to cost Australian taxpayers ~ \$450 million per annum in lost taxes
- Is chop-chop use associated with poor health?

# What's already known?

- Some smokers consider chop-chop to be more 'natural' and less harmful than legal tobacco
- the evidence suggests the reverse - that chop-chop carries *more* risk than licit tobacco



# Study design

- Focus groups - smokers with experience of chop-chop
- Australia-wide telephone survey of tobacco smokers



# Focus groups - methods

- Three groups containing eight smokers each, held over three weeks in September 2006
- All had smoked chop-chop at least once
- Recruited from street drug scenes in inner Melbourne, an advertisement at a smoking paraphernalia retailer, and by word of mouth

# Focus group results (1)

- Most participants believed;
  - chop-chop is healthier than licit tobacco - 'not chemically treated'
  - addiction is partially due to chemicals in licit tobacco - chop-chop is less addictive
- Some maintained risks equal - *"Everybody that smokes knows that they are killing themselves"*

## Focus group results (2)

- All reported that the quality of chop-chop tobacco varied greatly
- High levels of moisture in chop-chop were commonly mentioned;

*"I will not roll it wet. I have to dry it .... I can't smoke it straight out of the bag"*

# Focus group results (3)

Perceived health effects of chop-chop use:

- rapid-onset headaches
- nausea
- heartburn
- serious fungal infections





# Telephone survey

- Economics - prevalence of use, price thresholds, estimates of tax avoided
- How does the health of chop-chop smokers compare to the health of people who smoke only licit tobacco?
- What distinguishes chop-chop-users from non-users?

# Telephone survey - methods

- selected by Random Digit Dialling from the telephone white pages, stratified by state
- 18+ self-identified regular smokers
- Interviews conducted Mar-Jun '07, using CATI
- Health status measured using the SF-8™
- Specific health conditions - disability weights

# Telephone survey - results (1)

- 1,621 complete interviews - RR 62.8%.
- 95.6% reported smoking tobacco daily
- 58.3% had heard of chop-chop
- Lifetime (ever) chop-chop users = 24.5%
- Current ( $\geq$  occasional) chop-chop users = 7.1%

## Telephone survey - results (2)

Current use predictors	OR (95% CI)	p
Began smoking aged < 16 years	1.65 (1.09, 2.50)	0.019
Age (years)	0.98 (0.97, 1.00)	0.019
SF-8™ Social Functioning < 48	1.61 (1.06, 2.44)	0.026
Disability weight > 0	1.95 (1.08, 3.51)	0.027

## Telephone survey - results (3)

Lifetime use predictors	OR (95% CI)	p
Age < 45	1.82 (1.38, 2.39)	0.000
SF-8™ Mental Health < 49	1.61 (1.22, 2.13)	0.001
> 120 cigarettes smoked / week *	1.39 (1.06, 1.83)	0.018
SF-8™ Bodily Pain < 50†	1.40 (1.06, 1.85)	0.019
Began smoking aged < 16 years	1.33 (1.01, 1.75)	0.042

\* licit tailor-made or roll-your own tobacco, or chop-chop

† a lower score represents more pain

# Conclusions

- Our data imply that chop-chop smoking is associated with decreased mental and physical health
- Chop-chop smokers also reported high tobacco consumption and low age of smoking onset
- income, education level and employment status were not significant predictors (but, sampling bias?)



# Conclusions

- Harm reduction - deterrence of future chop-chop use through info at point-of-sale and warning labels?

