



Epi Data Tables

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

October 2012, No. 19

Qualitative Data on Young Adult, Non-Daily Smokers in New York City

Themes and Associated Quotes

Theme 1: 1) Perceived health risks from smoking are low among non-daily smokers.
2) Non-daily smokers report that health care providers do not consider them to be smokers, diminishing concerns about health impact.

Theme 2: Tobacco industry marketing may impact non-daily smokers.

Theme 3: 1) Despite an expressed desire to quit, non-daily smokers have difficulty quitting.
2) Non-daily smokers believe they would be more likely to quit smoking if not for the abundance and availability of cheap, loose cigarettes.

Theme 4: Dual use of tobacco and alcohol is problematic for non-daily smokers; although participants do not smoke daily, when triggered by alcohol use, they smoke heavily.

Data Sources

Focus Groups among Young Adult Non-Daily Smokers: In July 2011, six focus groups of eight participants each were conducted among non-daily smokers who were enrolled at the City University of New York. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 30, and the 90-minute groups were segregated by gender. Recruitment flyers offering a \$50 money order incentive for participation were posted at multiple CUNY campuses. All participants had smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime. Non-daily smoking was defined as smoking at least one cigarette per week most weeks, but less than daily smoking. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their smoking behaviors, self-identification as a smoker, and attitudes that allowed for rich descriptions of their experiences and opinions.

To access the related Epi Data Brief, go to www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/databrief19.pdf

Theme 1:

- 1) Perceived health risks from smoking are low among non-daily smokers.**
- 2) Non-daily smokers report that health care providers do not consider them to be smokers, diminishing concerns about health impact.**

Focus Group Findings

- “There’s a significantly lower risk for all different diseases compared to daily smokers. The impact of my smoking is minimal. Studies focus on regular smokers. There’s no research on sometimes smokers like us.” *(Female)*
- “I was at the doctor’s office for something, and I told her, ‘well, I had a cigarette last week.’ And she was like, ‘yeah, so no you’re not a smoker.’ That was her response!” *(Female)*
- “There’s a little thing you fill out at the doctor’s, ‘how many packs a day do you smoke?’ So I put in zero because I don’t smoke a pack a day at all, so I told him I smoke maybe two cigarettes a day and he’s, like, ‘oh, okay. That’s okay. Oh, you’re fine.’” *(Male)*
- “And my doctor, I only go once a year for a physical. And he was, like, ‘oh, you’re in perfect health, just stop smoking. Alright. Bye.’ And, now that I’ve played that back in my head, he should have at least been, like, if you’re not going to offer full help, would you like some help, you know, would you like some resources? You don’t have to hold my hand but here’s a pamphlet.” *(Female)*
- “I don’t think I do it enough to [experience health consequences] – like even though I guess most cigarettes could affect your health, but I don’t really – I mean, personally, I don’t believe I do it enough that it’s going to really do anything – I’m not going to get lung cancer tomorrow.” *(Male)*
- “So there’s 435,000 people that die a year from cigarette related illnesses. And you’re like, hands down, it’s the number one preventable thing in the country. Those statistics are great, but those are usually for people who are pack-a-day smokers. I mean, there’s just nothing out there [on non-daily smokers]. Like I don’t know if the fact that I smoke three cigarettes a month -- like how debilitating is that to my health?” *(Male)*
- I still feel like I’m kind of under the wire, and maybe I have a couple of years of occasional smoking left where I can really like have that still-safe buffer or whatever. I just think that being at my age and the frequency that I smoked and the fact that you know, I do only smoke this much, I still think I’m under the wire, and I still think I’m years away from having to address that – you know, buffering safety zone. *(Male)*
- “It’s not killing me instantly, so it kind of makes it okay. I mean, I don’t feel a great impact on my health, but I do feel an impact of it, and in general I know it’s bad. So I wish I didn’t do that.” *(Female)*

Source: Young Adult Non-Daily Smokers Focus Group Data, 2011

Theme 2: Tobacco industry marketing may impact non-daily smokers.

Focus Group Findings

- “I still buy into the cool factor of cigarettes. When I’m outside smoking, I’m presenting myself in a different way. My whole sense of identify shifts in some interesting way.” *(Female)*
- “In high school I thought that menthols were less severe. I really like the smell and the taste. It’s just like why I smoke and chew gum.” *(Female)*
- “I went from Newports at the beginning, and then when I moved down to Texas for awhile, I started smoking Marlboro Reds and Marlboro Lights, thinking that lights are much better. But I think it depends on your region, the area you're in, people who smokes around you. A lot of people smoke Newports in New York. Down south, it’s mostly either Marlboro Reds or Marlboro Lights. And I tried Luckys. *(Male)*
- “I stopped for a while, and then I started again, and I was smoking American Spirit yellows, because I thought that that was like a healthier alternative. “ *(Male)*
- And then I got hooked on menthols. But then I switched to – I actually always have liked the really long cigarettes, because they last a long time. They're kind of fancy.” *(Male)*
- I don't know what it is, but with different brands – I don't know. This is only just still from like Canada growing up – but like different brands would sort of associate people in different like subgroups (Laughter) in school. *(Female)*
- “There’s differences in like marketing and mystique and sort of what the brand identity is. But I don't – I also think that the cigarettes taste different. Like some of them have – I'm sure they have all sort of different stuff in them. You know. And they smoke differently, too. Like the filters are different, and like the density of the tobacco is different.” *(Male)*
- “I smoke Virginia Slim. Like, and usually it’s, like, process you know, like, it’s like, to me it’s like very feminine. And so just like when I first started to smoke, it was beautiful, it was not just the taste. I started to smoke to be a beautiful young female.” *(Female)*
- “I like the Camel Crush. It’s this amazing like party teaser. Just because they're regular – and then you squeeze the filter – they crush and become menthol. Like most guys hate menthol, so every now and then, like if my boyfriend wants one, I have to share. But he hates menthol. So it starts regular, and then you take a little Camel and you crush 'em.” *(Female)*

Source: Young Adult Non-Daily Smokers Focus Group Data, 2011

Theme 3:

- 1) Despite an expressed desire to quit, non-daily smokers have difficulty quitting.**
- 2) Non-daily smokers believe they would be more likely to quit smoking if not for the abundance and availability of cheap, loose cigarettes.**

Focus Group Findings

- “How come I cannot stick to [quitting]? How come I don't have actually control over it? Even though I would say that my body is not addicted to it... I am. I mean, my mind is, and I hate it.” *(Female)*
- “[Loosies] are everywhere... at the Chinese take-out, at grocery stores, across the street from my house, at corner stores. Bodegas will sell you one from the pack so you don't have to buy the whole thing.” *(Female)*
- “And, then I got pregnant and that was the worst. That's when I really realized how addicted I was, that I knew I couldn't have it but I was, like, I was shaking. I was shaking.” *(Female)*
- “I believe I'm mentally addicted because sometimes I'm just trying to find excuses for myself to smoke.” *(Female)*
- “I think those people who are selling the loosies are to blame for kids smoking, because if they weren't selling the loose cigarettes to the young kids from high school – because I know by every high school, there's a loosie spot.” *(Male)*
- “The amount of people that buy loosies at the store that I buy them, it's insane. I never buy a pack. A lot of people buy loosies a lot. A lot.” *(Male)*
- “I bet that I won't buy another pack for a while right now, because I really don't have a lot of money. And so I try not to buy cigarettes, because it's such a waste of money. I haven't quit for good but I do think it's possible for me to quit for several months. Or like this semester -- I didn't really smoke regularly until the end. But I still do bum cigarettes and I still smoke when I go out drinking, so I start up again.” *(Male)*
- “When I first started, I was buying packs, even though they were ten dollars. But then, I quit for a while, and then I just started buying it from people who have them for 50 cents or something like that. Or you know, if you're around your friends who have cigarettes, then it becomes like you're smoking more.” *(Female)*

Source: Young Adult Non-Daily Smokers Focus Group Data, 2011

Theme 4: Dual use of tobacco and alcohol is problematic for non-daily smokers; although participants do not smoke daily, when triggered by alcohol use, they smoke heavily.

Focus Group Findings

- “Drinking not only creates the trigger, but also... I’m dulled. My other senses are dulled so it doesn’t feel as unhealthy to me.” *(Female)*
- “I’m more of a smoker if I’m drinking... I will smoke an entire pack of cigarettes in one night if I’m drinking.” *(Male)*
- “Alcohol is my biggest association [with smoking]. The stress I’ve kind of gotten over. After a heavy meal, I’ve kind of gotten over. But, it’s definitely – I don’t know if it’s alcohol that makes me a little uninhibited or if it’s just an association with it. Oh, now I want a cigarette with that beer or something like that.” *(Female)*
- “It’s definitely for me one-hundred-percent social and every time I have a drink, that’s, that’s my – That’s the only association I can’t seem to break away from.” *(Female)*
- “I started smoking when I was drinking at that time. And you know, while you smoke – when you’re intoxicated, it adds to the buzz, so I picked up the habit from there.” *(Male)*
- “I don’t have a desire now to go outside to have a smoke or even when I’m stressed. I’ve never had that desire. I’ve just enjoyed smoking whenever I have a drink, which is weird.” *(Male)*
- “I feel like when I’m drunk, I burn through cigarettes really quick. Like I end up realizing I just smoked two, and while I’m standing outside drinking on the corner with my friends. I don’t even know where I got two cigarettes from. It goes quickly. I don’t know why, it just goes quicker.” *(Male)*
- “There’s some cigarettes that actually help you with the drinking, too. Like these pre-blend cigarettes – they’re aged in whiskey, so whenever you’re drinking, you feel the alcohol stronger.” *(Male)*
- “To have any shot at quitting smoking, I’m going to have to figure out a way to stop drinking. They just go together. When I’m drinking, I’m also smoking.” *(Female)*

Source: Young Adult Non-Daily Smokers Focus Group Data, 2011