

## How do young people get hold of tobacco?



This was the question asked of delegates to the STCA Youth and Tobacco Forum meeting held on 22 September 2011. The 25 meeting attendees were predominantly health promotion and youth workers and a facilitated discussion was arranged in groups of eight.

Some useful information from referenced sources has been included in information boxes to provide a factual context for the record of discussions, which is of course mainly opinion and anecdote based on the work experience of STCA Advocates.

### Tobacco procurement

In the view of Youth and Tobacco Forum members there has been no obvious change in the numbers of young people smoking with no obvious changes in the manner in which they obtain tobacco being noticed since the age of legal purchase was raised from 16 to 18 in October 2007.

Young people are still making money from selling cigarettes to their friends (50p per fag is the going rate). Procurement of tobacco is a cooperative effort amongst a network of friends and contacts.

Tobacco is obtained by under-eighteens from:

- smaller shops mainly, but supermarkets do still supply
- asking strangers and older teens to buy on their behalf
- cadging fags
- family
- ice-cream vans
- organised sales around club and party venues for young people.

Under-age purchase in most areas is not perceived as particularly risky or wrong and there seems to be a lack of awareness of the law particularly in regard to proxy-purchase.

Since underage smoking is regarded as a norm in areas of high prevalence there is support from adults and older teens for under-18 smoking. Youth workers have knowledge of young people being bought cigarettes by parents and grandparents as a coming of age type of gift followed by regular supplies.

There is a constant supply of cigarettes brought home in bulk from foreign holidays at local or duty-free prices and gifted or sold on to friends and family including to young people under-18. There

### [SALSU 2008](#)

Tobacco procurement by 15 year olds:

- 29% bought from shops
- 16% bought from friends and relatives
- 12% bought by friends or relatives
- 71% given tobacco

[Adolescents' awareness of and involvement with, illicit tobacco in the UK](#); Data analysis from wave 5 of the Youth Tobacco Policy Study in 2008, a long-term study monitoring adolescent response to tobacco policy in the UK.

- 25% of ever-smoker-teens had been offered tobacco they believed to be smuggled
- 14% had bought tobacco believed to be smuggled.

Tobacco Control  
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C Moodie, A M Mackintosh, R West

may not have been the necessary public information made available visibly and long enough to make an impact, possibly due to cut backs in trading standards services and a lack of investment from central government in public health advertising.

### **Tackling the problem of under-age procurement**

There are opportunities for getting a pro-health message across within communities:

- properly resourced test-purchasing operations should be encouraged and supported
- the Tobacco Register should help identify legitimate sellers and highlight those who do not have a historical track record in selling tobacco
- involving elected members in a drive to reduce access to minors would help to strengthen trading standards stance on access
- security equipment (smaller shops) could be looked at to provide evidence of mis-selling (suggestion only)
- using NHS / Council intranet systems
- raising awareness of the dangers of asking strangers
- education around delaying starting smoking for retailers
- address tobacco use through children's panel system and link in with panel training
- work closely with schools around tobacco smoking policies
- partnership working with youth organisations to influence attitudes
- zero tolerance approach is required within youth settings and youth projects.

There was a particular feeling within the group that the proxy-purchase of tobacco through strangers, often drug addicts or people willing to buy cigarettes in exchange for a cut from the purchase of "other favours", should be highlighted. This practice must bring vulnerable young people into potentially very risky interactions and has implications for safety especially amongst young girls. One Advocate reported that young people asking for help in procuring tobacco had been offered cannabis.

### **Illicit tobacco**

Most group members were not able to express a clear view on the extent to which young people obtained tobacco from illicit sources but felt that the Youth Forum could gather information about the extent of illicit tobacco use in their particular area.

It is not clear at the moment to what extent image and brand or taste is an issue for youth where illicit tobacco is concerned but it could be imagined that where illicit tobacco is normal, young people may not have experience of "normal" tobacco in order to make a comparison.

Price may not be such an issue because young people would not be able to bulk buy their cigarettes in any case.

It was suggested that Young SCOT might be in a position to carry out a survey of illicit tobacco use. By adding a price related question on SALSUS we may gather more information on the extent to which YP access tobacco from illicit sources. However, if cigarettes are bought singly in many cases this may not be a viable way of assessing illicit tobacco procurement

One suggestion is to incorporate work around illicit tobacco into local youth projects. Young people could be encouraged to develop questionnaires themselves. There is believed to be a great deal of regional variation.

A future illicit tobacco summit might bring in more of a training element to help professionals to tackle access to illicit tobacco locally.

### 2011 survey by North Ayrshire Trading Standards and Strathclyde Police

42 smoking teens (12 to 17) were informally interviewed just outside school grounds.

- 26% had tried Marble or Jin Ling (cheap whites)
- 59% had asked a stranger to purchase cigarettes on their behalf

Some quotes:

*I will smoke Marble cigs if that is all I can get. They are very strong but if I buy them I can get more for my money". **A 14 year-old boy.***

*"I go to this guy's house in the Village to buy them, he asks if I tell people I buy from him. I say no so he sells them to me" **A 14 year-old boy.***

*"We go down to the Cross (Irvine town centre) and ask the junkies to jump in for us. They will always get them for you if you give them a couple of ciggies." A 15 year-old boy.*

### Conclusion

STCA Advocates who provide support and health advice to young people have seen from their experience that young people are very adept at finding supplies of cigarettes from friends and relatives, from shops willing to sell illegally and by forging relationships with those willing to purchase on their behalf or provide cheap illicit tobacco.

There is therefore a need to raise awareness of the dangers associated with the supply of tobacco to under 18's and for adults and young people to fully understand the consequences to health of starting to smoke at a young age.

The STCA will seek to promote local surveying of under-age tobacco procurement as a means of raising awareness of the issues associated with under-age smoking and the links to crime and local drug supply.

If you would like to help support information gathering in a youth and community setting please contact Donald Lockhart at ASH Scotland:

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