

A consumption survey of snus users in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

To investigate snus consumption behaviour in Sweden, a telephone survey of around 3000 snus users – 2555 males and 359 females – was conducted between March and April of 2007. The survey addressed various topics, from average consumption per day and residence time in mouth to dependence and use of snus as a cessation aid. The male population was relatively evenly distributed between use of loose snus (41.9%) and portion snus (54.0%), while the female population predominantly used portion snus (92.7%). With regard to portion snus consumption, on average male consumption was 11.8 grams per day while the female group consumed on average 8.5 grams per day. Male portion snus users consumed on average 12 pouches a day while female portion snus users consumed an average of 10 pouches. Almost 70 % of the portion snus users answered they keep the pouch in mouth for more than 35 min. Subsequently reassessment of this question showed the median residence time in the mouth is 60 min. Twenty two percent of male snus users took their first snus within 5 minutes of waking, and 67 % of males took their first snus within 30 minutes of waking. The data was similar for females. The survey also found that around 47 % of males and females had used snus as a way to stop cigarette smoking.

INTRODUCTION

Several public health reports, including reviews by the International Agency for Research into Cancer (1) and the UK Royal College of Physicians (2), have recently considered the health risks associated with the use of various smokeless tobacco products, including snus. The RCP and others have also been considering whether making snus available, under a regulatory regime, in countries where it is currently prohibited might be a viable harm reduction strategy.

While prevalence data on snus use in Sweden is well documented (currently 22% in males and 4% in females (2)), there is less information on consumption patterns within snus users. The purpose of this study was to collect a wide range of consumption data on a nationally representative group of Swedish snus users.

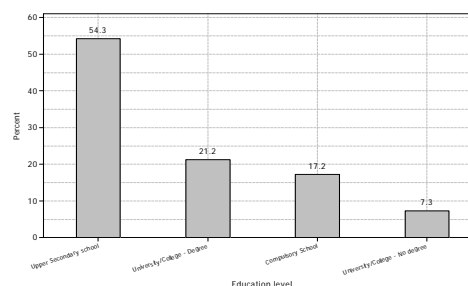
METHOD

The research method was a randomised telephone interview, undertaken by the research agency GFK, weighted across Sweden to be nationally representative. The pre-selection criteria for the interview was current snus users of ages 18 to 72. The questionnaire contained 54 questions with an interview time of typically around 10 minutes and no incentive was offered. Standard call-back procedures were used to verify a sample of interviews. Around 3000 snus users – 2555 males and 359 females – were interviewed between March and April of 2007. The survey addressed various topics, from average consumption per day and residence time in mouth to dependence and use of snus as a cessation aid. Resurvey on one question - exposure time with portion snus users (1019 people) – was undertaken in August 2007, because the range of options given in the first interview was found to be too small.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE STUDY POPULATION

The age distribution of the study population was similar to that recorded in Swedish national statistics.

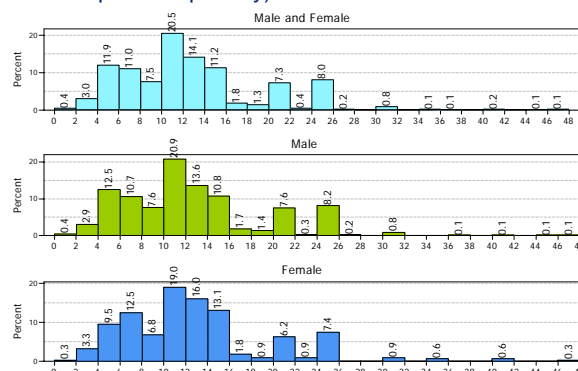
Questions on the highest level of education attained found over 20% of the population to have been educated at University and with a degree qualification.



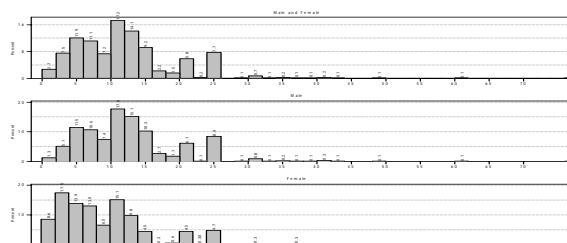
The majority were in full time employment and nearly 70% of the population were earning between SEK 15,000 and 35,000 per month before tax. Over half of the sample had been using snus for over 15 years.

RESULTS

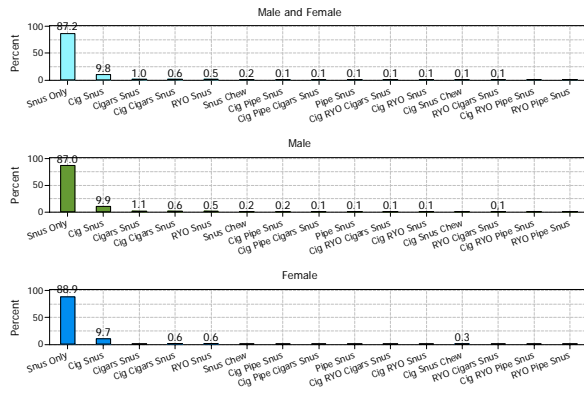
The sample population contained snus users that consumed loose and portioned snus. The results we present here focus on portion snus users. The study found a considerable variation in daily consumption pattern across the population, but similar distributions for males (mean 12 pouches per day) and females (mean 10.4 pouches per day).



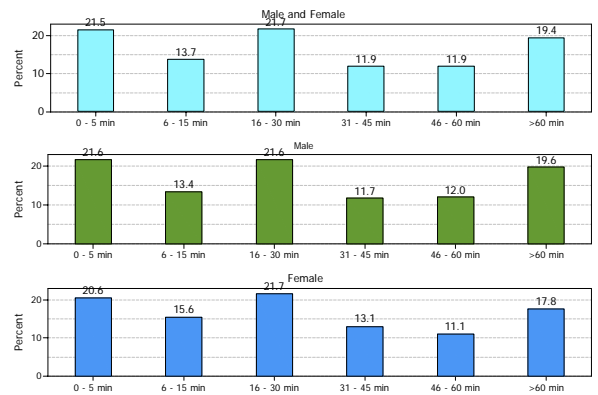
Female daily consumption in grams was found to be lower than males, partially because of the use of smaller pouches.



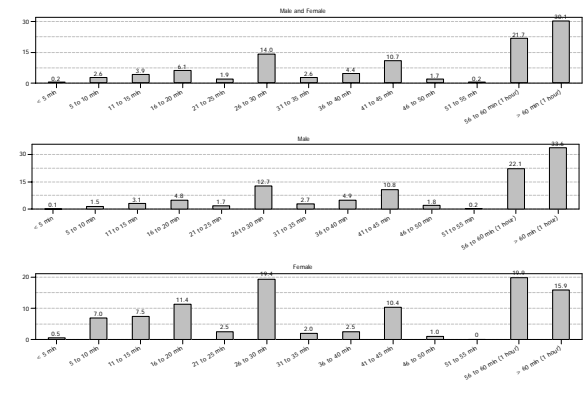
The survey found that the majority of those interviewed only used snus, though around 10% of both males and females used snus and cigarettes.



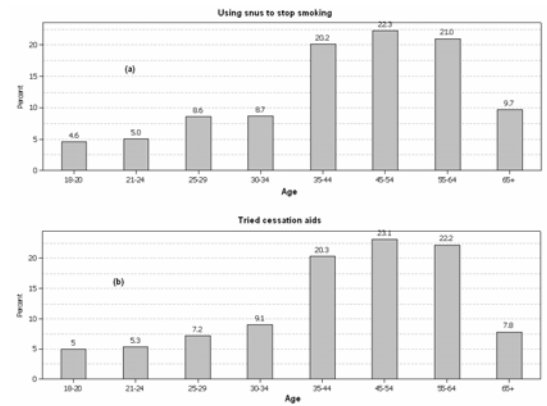
We also asked interviewees to estimate typically how soon after waking did they take their first snus, with around 20% of both males and females reporting first usage within 5 minutes of waking.



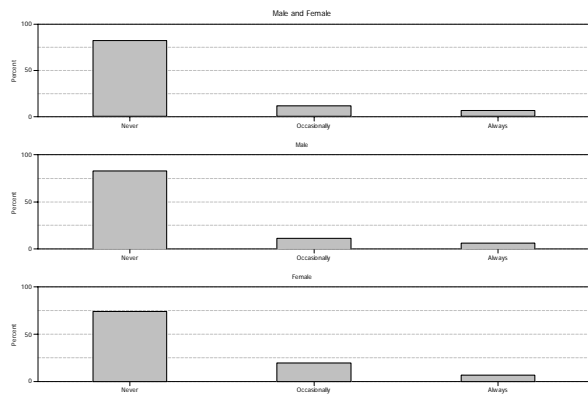
The study also found a range of reported times that the consumer kept the snus pouch in the mouth. The median time was around 60 minutes.



The survey also found that around 47% of males and females had used snus as a way to stop cigarette smoking. 35% of those using snus to quit smoking also had tried NRT products.



In response to a question about whether consumers moved the products around in the mouth during use, the majority responded that they kept the snus in the same position throughout use.



CONCLUSIONS

This survey provides some interesting insights into consumption patterns in Swedish snus users, including some unexpected findings such as the length of time that snus users typically keep pouches in the mouth.

REFERENCES

- (1) IARC Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic risks to humans, Volume 89, Smokeless tobacco and some tobacco specific nitrosamines, Lyon, France, 2007
- (2) Harm reduction in nicotine addiction. Helping people who can't quit, A report by the Tobacco Advisory Group of the Royal College of Physicians, October 2007