UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

"No-one actually goes to a shop and buys them do they?"

Stead, Martine; Jones, Laura; Docherty, Graeme; Gough, Brendan; Antoniak, Marilyn; McNeill, Ann

Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal

"No-one actually goes to a shop and buys them do they?": Attitudes and behaviours regarding illicit tobacco in a multiply disadvantaged community in England

Martine Stead (BA Hons), Institute for Social Marketing, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA. martine.stead@stir.ac.uk

Dr Laura Jones (PhD), UKCTCS (UK Centre for Tobacco Control Studies), Dept of Epidemiology & Public Health, University of Nottingham, City Hospital, Nottingham NG5 1PB. Laura.jones@nottingham.ac.uk

Graeme Docherty (BSc), UKCTCS, Dept of Epidemiology & Public Health, University of Nottingham, City Hospital, Nottingham NG5 1PB. Graeme.docherty@nottingham.ac.uk

Prof Brendan Gough (PhD), School of Social, Psychological & Communication Sciences, Leeds Metropolitan University, Calverly Building, Rm 902, City Campus, Leeds LS1 3HE. b.gough@leedsmet.ac.uk

Marilyn Antoniak (BA), UKCTCS, Dept of Epidemiology & Public Health, University of Nottingham, City Hospital, Nottingham NG5 1PB. marilyn.antoniak@gmail.com

Prof Ann McNeill (PhD), UKCTCS, Addictions Dept, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, Windsor Walk, London SE5 8AF. ann.mcneill@kcl.ac.uk

Running Heading: Illicit tobacco

Word Count: 4,643

Declarations of Interest: None

ABSTRACT

Aims: To explore attitudes towards, and experience of, illicit tobacco usage in a disadvantaged community against a backdrop of austerity and declining national trends in illicit tobacco use.

Design: Qualitative study using 10 focus groups.

Setting: Multiply disadvantaged community in Nottingham, UK.

Participants: 58 smokers, ex- and non-smokers aged 15-60 years.

Measurements: Focus group topic guides.

Findings: There was high awareness and usage of illegal tobacco sources, with 'fag houses' (individuals selling cigarettes from their own homes) being particularly widespread. Rather than being regarded as marginal behaviour, buying illicit tobacco was perceived as commonplace, even where products were known to be counterfeit. Smokers' willingness to smoke inferior "nasty" counterfeit products may be testament to their need for cheap nicotine. Illicit tobacco was seen to be of mutual benefit to both user (because of its low cost) and seller (because it provided income and support for the local economy). Illicit tobacco sellers were generally condoned, in contrast to government which was blamed for unfair tobacco taxation, attitudes possibly heightened by the recession. Easy access to illicit tobacco was seen to facilitate and sustain smoking with the main concern being around underage smokers who ~~could~~ were perceived to be able to buy cheap cigarettes without challenge.

2

Conclusions: National strategies to reduce illicit tobacco may have limited impact in communities during a recession and where illicit trade is part of the local culture and economy. There may be potential to influence illicit tobacco usage by building on the ambivalence and unease which were expressed around selling to children.

INTRODUCTION

Taxation is one of the key tobacco control policies used worldwide– when prices increase, consumption drops [1], and this effect appears to be greater for ~~more~~ disadvantaged smokers who are more price sensitive [2,3]. The use of tobacco which is not taxed seriously undermines the impact of this policy [4]. Untaxed tobacco is referred to here as 'illicit tobacco' and can be either smuggled (legitimately manufactured tobacco which has evaded tax regulations), bootlegged (legitimately manufactured tobacco but subsequently transported abroad where tax is unpaid) or counterfeit (illegally manufactured tobacco). The market in illicit tobacco is of concern for several reasons. The availability of illicit tobacco helps to maintain smoking by making cheap cigarettes readily available and reinforcing the normality of smoking, and may also undermine cessation intentions and increase youth smoking [5]. Loss to governments in tobacco taxation is considerable~~, .~~: around £2.2bn in the UK per year (£1.4bn from illicit cigarettes and £0.8bn from hand rolling tobacco) [6] and approximately €1.3bn ~~. The annual EU-wide tax loss due to cigarette smuggling is approximately €1.3bn~~annually EU-wide due to smuggling [7]. Finally, there have been reports of higher concentrations of certain toxic constituents in counterfeit tobacco [8], but given the extent of the health risks of licit tobacco, it is unclear whether counterfeit tobacco is significantly more harmful.

The use of illicit tobacco increased in the UK in the 1990s, prompting the UK Government to introduce strategies to reduce its use. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC, the Ministry responsible for taxation in the UK) was at the forefront of these efforts nationally, aiming largely to redress the loss of taxation revenue ~~when tobacco is purchased from illicit rather than licit sources~~. These strategies appear to have had some effect, with the illicit market share of cigarettes having reduced from 21% to 11% between 2000 and 2009/10, and

4

from 61% to 49% for hand-rolling tobacco over the same period [9]. Regional strategies have also been developed in parts of England to supplement national efforts and tackle demand issues as well as supply, such as the North of England Illicit Tobacco Programme (www.illicittobacconorth.com). Addressing the demand side is important and this involves understanding the characteristics of illicit tobacco users and the extent to which social norms may condone or support the consumption of illicit tobacco.

Research in the UK and North America has identified that those most likely to buy illicit tobacco are heavier smokers with higher levels of addiction, living in socially disadvantaged areas [3,10,11]. One of the first studies on the issue in the UK ~~to explore the attitudes of illicit tobacco buyers~~ suggested that the main motivations for purchase were price-based - to reduce the financial burden of smoking and to challenge the perceived injustice of regressive tobacco taxation - and that tobacco smugglers were perceived as providing a welcome service for people in poor areas [12]. Given that this research is now over ten years old, and given the recent policy initiatives to reduce illicit tobacco and observed reduction in its use, it is important to explore whether and how attitudes to illicit tobacco might have changed. Furthermore, it is possible that illicit markets may thrive in times of economic pressure and hardship [13] such as the recession currently affecting the UK and many other developed countries.

In this paper we therefore explore, using qualitative research methods, how illicit tobacco was perceived and experienced in a multiply disadvantaged community (~~which using a variety of sociodemographic indicators was~~ among the worst 10% in the country according to a variety of sociodemographic indicators) in Nottingham, UK during a time of increasing financial pressure ~~in~~ (the 2009 onset of the current recession~~2009, at the onset of the current~~

recession). ~~We focused on a disadvantaged community because of the previous research suggesting that illicit tobacco usage is more prevalent in these areas.~~ We were particularly interested in social and community norms surrounding illicit tobacco, buyers' understanding of the illicit market, the nature of the justifications offered for buying and selling illicit tobacco and the extent to which these may have been influenced by the wider socio-economic context, and how illicit tobacco might facilitate and sustain smoking.

METHODS

The data presented here derive from a wider study on smoking, funded by a local National Health Service Primary Care Trust, in a disadvantaged urban ward (an electoral district comprising approximately 17,000 residents) in Nottingham, UK with a smoking prevalence at that time of over 40% [14] compared with 22% nationwide at the time of the research. The project included focus groups with community residents to identify prevailing norms around smoking and health. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed for the first wave of focus groups covering knowledge and values around smoking behaviour and quitting as well as illicit tobacco. The study was approved by the Nottingham Research Ethics Committee in February 2009.

Focus groups were chosen to enable the social exchanges and interactions between group members to be captured. The focus groups comprised between two and eight persons, resident within the ward, and were recruited from posters and other advertising material placed in local facilities such as supermarkets and libraries, and within local and city wide newspapers. The advertisements invited contact from anyone over 15 years who was interested in contributing to a discussion on smoking. To enable people to feel comfortable discussing smoking and tobacco purchase, groups were constituted around pre-existing social

networks rather than imposing quota variables. A snowballing technique was also used to identify residents from certain areas so as to include people from most parts of the ward; the importance of this increased as the research progressed and it became apparent that there were socio-economic disparities within the ward, with one of the three main housing estates being particularly disadvantaged in terms of unemployment, housing type and perceived levels of anti-social behaviour. Individuals who expressed an interest in participating were sent or given a project information sheet and consent form with a pre-paid envelope which they completed and returned the research team before the group took place. Participants were given a £25 shopping voucher as a thankyou for taking part.

Figure 1 about here

Ten focus groups were carried out with 58 residents of a range of age groups, gender and smoking status (see Figure 1); each typically lasted around 90 minutes, and were arranged to allow people to attend in their immediate locality. The groups were frequently formed from naturally occurring friendship groups and so were mixed in terms of demographic characteristics. The focus groups were carried out by the co-authors (MA, AM, LJ, BG and GD), recorded using digital equipment, and transcribed by either an external company specialising in transcription or using in-house research assistants. The transcribed interviews were checked for accuracy by one author and anonymised. The transcripts were coded and analysed using grounded theory techniques in which the themes emerge from the participants' perspectives. Two of the authors independently read and coded the transcripts, following which key themes and concepts relating to illicit tobacco were agreed through discussion and further re-reading of the transcripts. Evidence of divergent perspectives was

7

actively sought in the transcripts and reported where relevant. Verbatim extracts from the group conversations are used in the paper to illustrate the findings.

We include relevant quotes from the transcripts embedded in the text identifying the source focus group number.

RESULTS

Prevalence of illicit tobacco sources

There was widespread awareness among residents, both smokers and non-smokers, of sources of illicit tobacco in their communities. Although illicit selling appeared particularly prevalent and active in the most disadvantaged of the three housing estates from which residents were drawn, residents from all parts of the ward were aware of the trade. The most common source mentioned was an individual selling cigarettes from their own home, otherwise known as a 'fag man' or a 'fag house' ('fag' is UK slang for a cigarette), and these were prevalent in the local area, with one resident claiming that *"Within 10 minutes walk of here [focus group venue] I think there is about four fag houses that I know of and there is guaranteed to be more"* (F4). Other illicit sources included *"certain pubs [where] if you know the right person you can get 50 grams of tobacco for £6, whereas 50 grams would cost you £10 normally"* (F9), workplace colleagues, car boot sales (a way of selling one's unwanted items, (F2)) and there were also reports of a single mobile van which sold ~~a range of goods including~~ single cigarettes, and appeared to have ~~under~~ under-age purchasers. This source was ~~very~~ so well known~~, so much so~~ that the name of the operator was supplied regularly: "*[name] sells singles, doesn't he, from an ice cream van"* (F2).

Normality of buying from fag houses

Many of the smokers and ex-smokers in the groups described using or having used fag houses and other illicit sources themselves. Some dipped in and out of illicit buying depending on their financial circumstances, buying legal tobacco on days they could afford it *"it's only crackerjack [ie. good] days you get them"* (F6) and illicit tobacco on days *"when I'm broke"* (F5). Others appeared to buy all their cigarettes or tobacco from illicit sources – *"I will not go down a shop to buy cigarettes"* (F7) – and regarded this as the normative route to accessing tobacco among their peers: *"It's all contraband isn't it really now? No-one actually goes to a shop and buys them do they?"* (F6). Language such as this suggested that obtaining tobacco illicitly was regarded as a normative rather than a marginal behaviour. Indeed, in one all-male focus group, a smoker who chose to buy from shops was mocked for being deliberately extravagant *"He's trying to be flash [ie. to impress others with a show of wealth], I think"* (F6).

This impression is further confirmed by accounts of how fag house transactions were conducted, which indicated that the process was seen and experienced as straightforward, with little stigma, risk or danger involved: *"You just go up to the house, ask for some fags and give them the money and walk off"* (F4). Such was the perceived normality of the illicit tobacco market that it was regarded as inevitable and impossible to eradicate: *"They've been there for so long they are part of the culture now…I think it would be pretty much impossible to stop people getting cheap fags"* (F4).

Illicit tobacco facilitates and sustains smoking

Fag houses were perceived to be particularly important for under-age smokers, because they provided easier access to tobacco than did legal outlets: *"You get kids running around to*

9

certain houses selling cheap fags, £2-3 a packet, full of god knows what chemicals because they're called snide fags, they're not real. Well, they are real but you know what I mean...the kids are going around and people aren't going to say 'you're not 16', they're not a shop are they?" (F8).

Residents described how children were seen frequently visiting fag houses, and how they themselves had visited fag houses when younger; some described children being taken to fag houses "*in the pram*" (F3). In some fag houses, the buyer and seller enacted a tokenistic pretence that the child was buying for an adult: one young person described how some sellers *"are a little bit strict but then….if you say it's for my mum or something then yeah, they'll serve you"* (F5). In others, even this was not necessary, and residents perceived that children could simply buy tobacco without being challenged: *"Oh yeah. If a child was to knock on someone's door, it's like, my daughter's five, if she was to go over the road when she's at her granny's and get some fags, they'd give them her. Even though she's five, they'd still give them her"* (F10). Both fag houses and mobile shop vans also allowed children to buy cigarettes individually if they did not have enough money for a full packet: *"You can go to someone's house and say 'I just want to buy a single', and they'll sell you a single for 40p, or a shop van…12p on the shop van"* (F7). This ease of access to cigarettes was identified by several adult smokers and ex-smokers as a key factor in facilitating the process of their taking up the habit: *"that's how we all started smoking", "there wasn't enough else to do so it was get a packet of fags, like you say, from the fag house because there was one and go sit on the park and smoke fags"* (F3). For established smokers, the presence of fag houses enabled them to afford smoking and to avoid the painful effects of price rises. Several believed that if they did not have access to fag houses, they would have to quit smoking: *"I know actually we would have to pack up. If we had to pay that full price at a shop for 'bacco, we wouldn't be*

smoking because you wouldn't be able to afford it. It's half the price of a shop so that actually encourages what you do." (F2)

Differentiating the sources of illicit tobacco

Generally, residents were aware of both legitimately and non-legitimately manufactured tobacco, both of which appeared to be widely available in the communities. The former included *"tax free"* cigarettes, cigarettes bought in bulk from European supermarkets, "*contraband*", and cigarette packets sold individually from multi-packs originally bought tax-free and then split open for illegal re-sale. Non-legitimately manufactured tobacco sources were variously described by smokers as *"fake", "copy", "dodgy" "dirty", "not real"* or "*snide*" (English slang for fake), suggesting a clear understanding of their counterfeit nature. Even where such cigarettes were packaged in mainstream brand liveries, it was generally recognised that they were counterfeit - that the pack branding had been copied -, or that an original branded package had been used and filled with counterfeit tobacco. Counterfeit cigarettes were perceived to have originated abroad: *"~~They come~~ from Poland and places like that~~'"~~*(F10).

For the smokers in the study, illegally manufactured cigarettes differed from legal ones in that they tended not to display health warnings - *"they haven't got nowt [nothing] on"* (F2) – and were *"unregulated"* (F3)~~unregulated~~ in terms of content and the manufacturing process. Smokers' accounts of the inferiority of counterfeit tobacco were colourful and vivid, suggesting they ~~were under~~harboured no illusions as to the quality of the product: *"really, really nasty, acrid taste to it"* (F9); *"they smell disgusting, they stink"* (F7); "*horrible*", "*razors on your throat"*, *"rat poison in them and shit"* (F5). One smoker frankly acknowledged that "*some of it's shite, isn't it?"* (F6), although he nonetheless bought it

11

regularly. There appeared to be an element of bravado in some of these comments, as if consuming foul-tasting cigarettes was a sign of strength and stoicism. Nevertheless, smokers' preparedness to smoke even cigarettes that they knew were unpleasant and inferior was testament to the need for nicotine. As one smoker explained, even when a batch of cigarettes was *"nasty", "you might have bought 200 of them so you're just going to smoke them anyway"* (F3).

Worse than 'proper' cigarettes

Counterfeit manufacturers were perceived to *"chuck anything"* into tobacco products, ~~such as~~including *"dirt off the floor"* (F3) and *"plastic shavings"* (F7), and this, combined with their 'rough' taste, contributed to a perception that counterfeit cigarettes and rolling tobacco were more harmful than their legally manufactured equivalents: *"the worst fags"* (F2); *"100% more dangerous"* (F7). The important observation here is that in perceiving counterfeit cigarettes to be relatively more harmful, smokers did not appear to reflect on the absolute harmfulness of 'proper' cigarettes. Indeed, they implicitly contrasted the very 'dodginess' of counterfeit cigarettes, full of *"god knows what chemicals"* (F8) ~~and *"unregulated"* (F3)~~, with the purity of *"shop"* cigarettes (as if legally manufactured cigarettes are somehow chemical- and harm-free). Licit cigarettes were almost seen to have a stamp of 'quality' in that *"if you buy it from a shop there's a standard that they have to have to make that cigarette"* (F3).

Mutual benefit

The primary justification offered for fag houses was that they saved smokers money. The wisdom of obtaining cigarettes and tobacco at half of the prices charged in shops was self-evident: ~~to fag house customers~~ *"Because it's so cheap, you think why am I going to go to*

12

the shop, pay all this money, when I can just go to this person and get them cheaper, half the price." (F8). As another expressed it,); *"Do you want to pay £12.00 for a pouch or do you want to pay £6.00 for a pouch, let's put it in laymen's terms"* (F6). Where cigarettes were regarded as an essential protected purchase, any means of accessing them more cheaply was to be welcomed, and this was even more important - particularly during a period of financial hardship:

> *"We're in recession, we're skint aren't we? We need it."*
>
> **Mod: So you agree with illicit smuggling?**
>
> *"Oh yeah."* (F6)

A further justification for the existence of fag houses was that they provided an income for local sellers. Smokers who bought from fag housesFag house customers emphasised the normality of many of the sellers: ordinary residents like themselves, *"grandmas and pensioners"* (F5), simply trying to make a living. The relationship between suppliers and customers was mutually beneficial: buying from a fag house helped *"to keep [the seller] afloat"* (F2) in difficult times, and running a fag house provided a service to one's neighbours akin to door-to-door catalogue selling: *"It's like Avon, innit?"* (F5). Interestingly, where smokers were aware of fag house sellers who were wealthy business people, the attitude tended to be one of approval for their sharp business acumen rather than resentment of their wealth.

Alternative morality

In general, smokers and ex-smokers appeared untroubled by the morality or legality of buying illicit tobacco. Several factors appeared to contribute to this relaxed attitude. First,

there appeared to be a tolerance, or at least lack of disapproval, of illegality in general in the communities, as manifest in the existence of black markets for a wide range of goods including illicit drugs, T-shirts, training shoes and confectionery: *"the toffee house in [name of area] that sells toffee to all the kids, contraband"; the weed man", "the crack man"* (F6). Secondly, buying illicit tobacco was a blow against the perceived unfairness of tobacco taxation: *"£6 for 20 fags, ridiculous"* (F2). It was striking that criticism of tobacco prices was almost solely directed at *"the government... taking too much"* (F6), rather than at retailers or the tobacco companies. Government rhetoric and actions were perceived as hypocritical and illogical - stigmatising smokers for *"costing the NHS"* money (F3) yet relying on the taxation revenue from tobacco sales – and smokers readily appealed to this perceived double standard as justification for engaging in the illicit tobacco market. Any initiatives or messages that smokers had heard to discourage buying illicit tobacco ~~could be sceptically~~tended to be dismissed ~~simply~~ as government attempts to protect revenue: ~~in response to~~ one respondent ~~suggesting that illicit cigarettes were "more poisonous than most shop fags", another~~ retorted that the *"the government will tell you that [that illicit cigarettes are dangerous] because they want you to pay their taxes"* (F6). Thirdly, linked to this and discussed above, buying illicit tobacco could even be positioned as fairer than buying shop tobacco because it sustained the local economy. In one exchange, the discomfort expressed by the first respondent at the parallels between drug dealing and fag houses is countered by the second respondent with an appeal to an alternative morality: namely, that the government does not benefit and the money stays within the local community:

R4: *"Yeah. It's like drug dealers isn't it? These are, they're getting fat off of other people's ..."*

14

R7: "Yeah but at least they get to see that money, the government don't take it, you know what I mean? To some people that's a way of earning a living."(F6)

There was also, however, awareness that some sellers had rumoured links to organised crime, and here fag house users tended to distance themselves by arguing that most sellers were not involved in such activity, or that 'their' seller only dealt in tobacco, not drugs - *"two different kettles of fish"* (F6).

Ambivalence and disapproval

Generally fag houses were regarded as an inevitable and unproblematic feature of the communities. However, one aspect of their existence which generated unease was ~~their~~ selling cigarettes to children~~. S~~, which several residents, including some smokers, felt ~~strongly that selling to children~~ crossed a line of acceptability, despite the fact that several recounted having bought from fag houses themselves as children and still did buy from fag houses as adults. Residents thought that illicit traders were unconcerned about selling to an under-age customer because, unlike with alcohol, there was perceived to be no risk of immediate harm to the child: *"~~with cigarettes nothing happens to you...~~the consequence if you were selling alcohol to them under age, yeah something really bad, they could choke on their own sick, anything, now I'm going to get locked up for life, but with a cigarette you're not going to get that"* (F3). Several smokers who were parents commented approvingly on local shopkeepers who took a robust line on not selling to children, contrasting them with the fag house sellers whose concern for profit over-rode any sense of responsibility to the community of which they were a part: *"Yeah, the shops and stuff are alright, it's just these fag houses and that, they don't owe anything to our kids"* (F3). One smoker made the clear distinction between the sellers he knew, who operated by an implicit code of never selling *"to*

anybody other than who they know [and] never sell to a child", and those sellers who *"haven't got morals"* (F2).

DISCUSSION

Our study found that the illicit tobacco market was widely known about and active in this community, despite evidence that illicit tobacco use was declining overall in England and despite national interventions to reduce supply and demand for illicit tobacco. The purchase of illicit tobacco, particularly through 'fag houses', was common, and there was a willingness knowingly to smoke inferior counterfeit products. Illicit tobacco was seen to benefit both the user and the local economy, and hence illicit tobacco sellers were generally condoned, except where they sold to children, a practice which evoked some ambivalence. Easy access to illicit tobacco was perceived to facilitate and sustain smoking. Our research also revealed significant misconceptions as to the relative risks of illicit tobacco compared to licit tobacco, and a belief that the government has responsibility for quality control and safety standards for licit tobacco which renders it less harmful. Concerns about children's access to illicit tobacco appeared to be the only potential lever for affecting attitudes.

Caution is needed in generalising from the findings of this study, conducted in one highly disadvantaged council ward in a large conurbation in England, to other low income communities. The focus groups did not aim to recruit a representative sample of local residents in a disadvantaged community, but to explore views and experiences ~~of illicit tobacco~~ within pre-existing social groups. Findings might have differed if the study had involved other residents or been conducted in a different community. However, given there is relatively little research in this area, and given a current economic climate in which illicit

markets might flourish, ~~W~~we believe that these findings increase understanding more broadly of the factors influencing illicit tobacco purchase and use elsewhere.

~~this research is important for understanding~~The research also potentially throws light on smoking patterns in disadvantaged groups, and ~~potentially throws light on~~ how to reduce smoking-caused health inequalities. ~~We believe that these findings increase understanding more broadly of the factors influencing illicit tobacco purchase and use elsewhere.~~

The study builds on previous research in this area. Like Wiltshire and colleagues' [12] earlier study, our study finds that smokers in low income communities regard illicit tobacco sellers as providing a valuable service, ~~and that this~~a view ~~is~~ perhaps even more strongly held in a time of economic recession. Our finding that the seller-buyer relationship ~~between sellers and buyers~~ is seen as mutually dependent and beneficial is supported by Hornsby and Hobbs [15], whose study of cigarette smuggling in the UK found *"almost unanimous support for the smugglers within the working-class communities"* (p16), and by Shelley's [3] study of street corner bootleg tobacco ~~sellers~~ vendors in New York City, which found that sellers were trusted and respected ~~within their communities~~figures. As found in other studies, smokers and ex-smokers perceived that it was justified to seek means to circumvent high tobacco taxation ~~punishes smokers and that means to circumvent it were justified~~ [12], but a difference emerged between our research and previous UK research in attitudes to counterfeit tobacco specifically. Whereas previous studies [12,16,17,18] found some ambivalence and reluctance among ~~buyers of smuggled tobacco~~illicit tobacco smokers regarding counterfeit ~~tobacco~~products, because of concerns about ~~its poor~~ quality, unknown ingredients and risk to health, our smokers were less concerned: they knew that much of the tobacco sold through fag houses was counterfeit, unregulated and unpleasant, but nonetheless bought it. This more hardened stance may reflect more straitened economic circumstances among our sample of

residents, and/or heavier levels of addiction, given that dependence is stronger among those in more disadvantaged groups [19]. Our study also adds new insights into the demand side of the illicit tobacco market. Smokers distinguished between the unregulated manufacturing process for counterfeit tobacco, ~~which results in~~associated with "disgusting" products full of inappropriate ingredients, and the process for 'proper' tobacco, which, by virtue of being regulated, was seen as relatively pure and safe. Few smokers in this study appear to recognise the harmfulness per se of tobacco in general, or if they did seemed unwilling openly to acknowledge these risks. Efforts to deter illicit tobacco use by focusing on the greater harms associated with counterfeit products may ironically lend reassurance to use of their legal equivalents, and deflect attention from the harmfulness of tobacco use per se.

Another theme from our study is the wider black market context – fag houses were just one manifestation of a clearly well-established and accepted illicit economy in the community, trading in both the highly illegal (class A drugs) and the mundane (confectionery). Locating the purchase of illicit tobacco as part of a wider spectrum of illicit consumer behaviours may yield new insights into the practice. Studies in this area suggest that legal norms and social norms are often at odds, with some activities prohibited by the law (for example, illegal downloading or buying pirate DVDs) being regarded as almost entirely normal and unproblematic by many consumers [20]. A UK study found that a third of those surveyed had knowingly purchased counterfeit goods [21], suggesting that far from being marginal or criminal, buying illicitly can be seen as an everyday practice. This was certainly the case among our respondents, where as one expressed it, fag houses were "part of the culture". ~~Unethical or i~~Illicit consumer behaviours may particularly be seen as acceptable where the goods are regarded as necessities or the buyer is in particular need [22], as witnessed in our

18

study. The policy implications here are clear: appeals to morality, shame and stigma to deter illicit tobacco purchase are likely to have little traction.

Another feature of unethical consumer behaviours is that they tend to be regarded as victimless crimes (to the extent that they are regarded as crimes at all) [20~~]. The perceived victimlessness of the crime is thought to minimise any psychological discomfort involved in unethical or illegal activity [~~,22], ~~while~~ and for some black market consumers, the opportunity to 'get one over' on faceless big business or government may form part of the appeal [23]. Neale and Fullerton [24] suggest that where businesses are seen to behave unscrupulously in the pursuit of profits, some consumers will feel entitled to level the playing field by behaving likewise (p483). Two interesting observations arise from this ~~insight~~ suggestion~~with regard to the present study~~. Firstly, our fieldwork was conducted in 2009, after a year of multi-million pound government 'bail outs' and 'rescue packages' for failing financial institutions whose executives were perceived to have gone 'unpunished' [25]. It is possible that this backdrop lent moral justification to activities such as illicit tobacco trading, which could be seen as both less 'wrong' ~~, in scale terms,~~ and as a necessary survival response by poor people who would bear the brunt of the financial catastrophe. Secondly, in our study, smokers' anger and cynicism ~~was~~ were directed *not* at big business – the tobacco industry - but rather at government. This suggests that illicit tobacco control initiatives seen to be associated with national government risk being dismissed merely as efforts to protect ~~taxation~~ revenues unless carefully handled. Heightening awareness of the ~~misleading and cynical~~ tactics used by the 'legitimate' tobacco industry may help to counteract such responses as well as encouraging attitudinal change to denormalise smoking [26].

Our study therefore suggests that several common-sense strategies to reduce demand for illicit tobacco (eg. emphasising differential harmfulness) ~~are likely to~~may have limited effect in communities where the illicit tobacco market is well established and supported. ~~Our research~~The findings do~~es~~, however, suggest that a degree of ambivalence exists around the links to organised crime and drug dealing, and around fag houses selling to children. Although many smokers reported buying cigarettes from illicit sources as children, other respondents were less tolerant of, and indeed expressed some anger towards, those 'fag-men' that sold to children. This latter point is particularly important in light of increasing evidence of young people's ability to access smuggled or counterfeit tobacco ~~that~~ in some communities ~~young people can easily obtain tobacco which has been smuggled or counterfeit~~ [27,28,29]. This route of appealing to smokers not to ~~condone or~~ feed the illicit tobacco trade, may offer some promise, ~~an approach that~~and has been tested in a recent North of England campaign with some success [30]. We believe that further research to prevent illicit tobacco use in highly disadvantaged communities is necessary to ensure tobacco control strategies are not undermined.

REFERENCES

1. Jha P., Chaloupka F.J. *Curbing the Epidemic: Governments and the Economics of Tobacco Control*. Washington DC: World Bank; 1999.

2. Amos A., Bauld L., Clifford D., et al. *Tobacco control, inequalities in health and action at a local level.* York: Public Health Research Consortium; 2011

3. Shelley D., Cantrell J., Moon-Howard J., Ramjohn D.Q., VanDevanter N. The $5 Man: The underground economic response to a large cigarette tax increase in New York City. *American Journal of Public Health* 2007; **97**: 1483-1488.

4. West R., Townsend J., Joossens L., Arnott D., Lewis S. Why combating tobacco smuggling is a priority. *BMJ* 2008; **337**.

5. Joossens L., Merriman D., Ross H., Raw M. The impact of eliminating the global illicit cigarette trade on health and revenue. *Addiction* 2010; **105**: 1640-1649.

6. Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC). *Measuring Tax Gaps 2012*. London: HMRC; 2012. http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/statistics/tax-gaps/mtg-2012.pdf

7. Cooper A., Witt D. The linkage between tax burden and illicit trade of excisable products: the example of tobacco. *World Customs Journal* 2012;**6**: 41-58.

8. Stephens W.E., Calder A., Newton J. Source and heath implications of high toxic metal concentrations in illicit tobacco products. *Environmental Science Technology* 2005; **39**: 479-488.

9. Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC). *Tackling Tobacco Smuggling – building on our success. A renewed strategy for HM Revenue & Customs and the UK Border Agency*. London: HMRC; 2011.

10. Taylor A.J., Langdon M., Campion P. Smuggled tobacco, deprivation and addiction. *European Journal of Public Health* 2005; **15**: 399-403.

11. Luk R., Cohen J.E., Ferrence R., McDonald P.W., Schwartz R., Bondy S.J. Prevalence and correlates of purchasing contraband cigarettes on First Nations reserves in Ontario, Canada. *Addiction* 2009; **104**: 488-495.

12. Wiltshire S., Bancroft A., Amos A., Parry O. "They're doing people a service"-qualitative study of smoking, smuggling, and social deprivation. *BMJ* 2001; **323**: 203–207.

13. Arkes J. Recessions and the participation of youth in the selling and use of illicit drugs. *Int J Drug Policy* 2011, Apr 8 [Epub ahead of print]

14. Bright Sparks Research. *Nottingham Citizens Survey 2009*. Nottingham: Bright Sparks Research; 2010. http://www.nottinghaminsight.org.uk/insight/library/citizens-survey.aspx

15. Hornsby R., Hobbs D. A zone of ambiguity: The political economy of cigarette bootlegging. *British Journal of Criminology* 2007; **47**: 551-571.

16. Moodie C., Hastings G.B., Joossens, L. Young adult smokers' perceptions of illicit tobacco and the possible impact of plain packaging on purchase behaviour. *European Journal of Public Health* 2012; **22**: 251-253.

17. Peppermint Research Ltd. *Cheap (counterfeit and smuggled) cigarettes: A qualitative exploration into consumer attitudes and awareness*. Unpublished presentation; 2007.

18. Peppermint Research Ltd. *Leveraging counterfeit tobacco with a smoking cessation aim.* Unpublished presentation, 2007.

19. Jarvis M.J., Wardle J. Social patterning of individual health behaviours: The case of cigarette smoking. In Marmot M., Wilkinson R.G. (eds), *Social Determinants of Health (2nd Edition)* 2006.

20. Balestrino A. It is a theft but not a crime. *European Journal of Political Economy* 2008; **24**: 455-469.

21. Rutter J., Bryce J. The Consumption of Counterfeit Goods: 'Here Be Pirates?' *Sociology* 2008; **42**: 1146-1164.

22. Casola L., Kemp S., MacKenzie A. Consumer decisions in the black market for stolen or counterfeit goods. *Journal of Economic Psychology* 2009; **30**: 162–171.

23. Tom G., Garibaldi B., Zeng Y., Pilcher, J. Consumer Demand for Counterfeit Goods. *Psychology and Marketing* 1998; **15**: 405-421.

24. Neale L., Fullerton S. The international search for ethics norms: which consumer behaviors do consumers consider (un)acceptable? *Journal of Services Marketing* 2010; **24**: 476-486.

25. Guardian, The. *Banking crisis timeline: How the credit crunch has led to dramatic, unprecedented events in the City, on Wall Street and around the world.* Thursday 30 October 2008. http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2008/oct/08/creditcrunch.marketturmoil

26. Farrelly M.C., Healton C.G., David K.C., Messeri P., Hersey J.C., Haviland M.L. Getting to the Truth: Evaluating national tobacco countermarketing campaigns. *Am J Public Health* 2002; **92**: 901-907.

27. Moodie C., MacKintosh A.M., West R. Adolescents' awareness of, and involvement with, illicit tobacco in the UK. *Tobacco Control* 2010; **19**: 521-522.

28. Hughes S.K., Hughes K., Atkinson A.M., Bellis M.A., Smallthwaite L. Smoking behaviours, access to cigarettes and relationships with alcohol in 15- and 16-year-old schoolchildren. *European Journal of Public Health* ~~2010~~2011; **21**: 8-14.

29. Callaghan R.C., Veldhuizen S., Leatherdale S., Murnaghan D., Manske S. Use of contraband cigarettes among adolescent daily smokers in Canada. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2009; **181**: 6-7.

30. McNeill A., Iringe-Koko B., Bains M., Bauld L., Siggens G., Russell A. Reducing demand for and supply of illicit tobacco: the North of England Programme. Under review.

Figure 1: Constitution of focus groups*

Group # (n)	Participants
F1 (5)	5 females (3 smokers, 2 ex smokers) 30-50 years
F2 (7)	3 males 2x 30-50, 1x 16- 20 (all smokers); 4 females 30-50 years (2 smokers, 1 ex smoker, 1 non smoker)
F3 (6)	2 male smokers; 4 female smokers (1 male Afro Caribbean; 1 female Afro Caribbean/White) 20-30 years
F4 (5)	1 male smoker (20-30 years); 4 females (2 smokers (20-30 years), 2 non smokers (1x16-20 years; 1x 20-30 years); (1 Black)
F5 (7)	3 male smokers; 4 females, (3 smokers, 1 ex smoker) 16-20 years (2 Black)
F6 (8)	8 males (6 smokers, 1 ex smoker, 1 non smoker) 30-50 years (2 were under 20)
F7 (6)	5 males (4 smokers, 1 ex smoker); 1 female smoker 20-30 years
F8 (6)	1 male non smoker 20-30 years; 5 females (1 smoker, 1 ex smoker, 3 non smokers) 30-50 years (2 were 16-20)
F9 (4)	4 females (3 15-20 non smokers, 1x 30-50 smoker); 3 Sikh non smokers
F10 (4)	4 females (1 smoker, 2 ex smokers, 1 non smoker) 20-30 years (10Afro-Caribbean/White non-smoker)

- *Participants were White unless otherwise indicated*