

Smoking in Ireland 2014:

Synopsis of Key Patterns

HSE National Tobacco Control Office
Health and Wellbeing Division



SMOKING IN IRELAND 2014: SYNOPSIS OF KEY PATTERNS

By

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February 2015

Published by Health Service Executive

ISBN: 978-1-898098-64-5

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the staff of Ipsos MRBI for collecting the data on behalf of the HSE. In particular we would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of Aisling Corcoran and Rebecca Gildea in compiling this report. We wish to acknowledge the input of the Health Intelligence Unit, HSE and Dr Fenton Howell, Department of Health, in reviewing and editing this report. We also wish to thank Claire Dunne for proof reading, printing and for assistance throughout the project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Tobacco Control (OTC) initiated a smoking prevalence tracker survey (Smoking Tracker Survey) in July 2002. The survey was continued by the OTC until the Office was dissolved in 2010. At that stage many of the functions of the OTC transferred to the Health Service Executive who have continued the survey.

The smoking prevalence tracker survey involves a monthly nationally representative telephone poll of 1000 people (randomly selected) aged 15 years and over. The smoking prevalence question in the survey is, *“Do you smoke one or more cigarettes each week, whether packaged or roll your own?”*

The survey includes a range of sociodemographic characteristics that facilitate analysis by gender, age cohort, social socioeconomic group and region.

Basic information obtained from the survey has been published on the OTC and HSE websites over the years. To improve accessibility to the dataset this concise downloadable report is being published in its present format.

Smoking prevalence

The analysis of smoking patterns for 2014 established that:

- The overall prevalence of cigarette smoking in 2014 was 19.5%. This compares to 21.5% for 2013. This equates to over 70,000 fewer smokers in 2014 compared to 2013.
- A higher percentage of men (21.6%) reported being smokers than women (17.6%).
- Smoking rates were highest among young adults (18-34 years), reaching 27.3% in the 25-34 year old age group. Prevalence was lowest among the 15-17 age group at 7.9%.
- The highest cigarette smoking prevalence rates were in the lower socioeconomic groups (C2, 22.7%, DE, 24.1%) The

lowest smoking rates (13.8% and 10.8%) were among higher socioeconomic groups (AB) and farmers (F).

- Smoking rates were lowest in Connaught/Ulster (17%), with higher rates in Munster (18.8%) and the rest of Leinster at (19.8%). Dublin experienced the highest rate at 21.6%.
- Using moving averages, overall smoking prevalence has declined from 28.28% in June 2003 to 19.53% in December 2014 (21.55% males and 17.59% for females).

Profile of Smokers

The analysis of current smokers for 2014 established that:

- 54.1% of smokers are male with 45.9% female.
- 49% of smokers are aged between 25 and 44 years with 19.2% aged 55+.
- The DE socioeconomic group accounts for 38.6% of smokers.
- The C1 (23.9%) and C2 (24.3%) categories each comprise almost a quarter of the smoking population.
- Munster and the rest of Leinster account for similar proportions of smokers, with Dublin showing the highest percentage at 31.2%.
- 36% of all smokers were regular smokers (11-20 cigarettes per day), while 59.2% were occasional to light smokers (10 or less cigarettes per day) with 4.8% being heavy smokers (21+ cigarettes per day).
- On average 12.71 cigarettes are smoked per day.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death worldwide, killing over five million people annually. In Ireland, it is estimated that 5200 people die annually from smoking related diseases. Although Ireland has made significant advances in reducing the impact of smoking on health, death rates from smoking related diseases remain 9% higher than the European average.

To help combat the harmful effects of smoking, it is important that smoking prevalence and behaviour are carefully monitored. Such data can be utilised to assess the impact of existing initiatives and inform decision making in terms of future policy direction. The importance of national population based monitoring data has been recognised by the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.¹ In addition, The Health Service Executive (HSE) Tobacco Control Framework² also stresses the importance of comprehensive tobacco monitoring. Although a number of national surveys have been undertaken over the last decade in Ireland,³⁻⁵ the time interval between surveys limits their usefulness as ongoing planning and decision making tools. As such, the Office of Tobacco Control developed its monthly smoking prevalence surveys which commenced in July 2002. Many of the functions of the Office transferred to the National Tobacco Control Office of the HSE in 2010. A nationally representative survey of 1000 people (aged 15 years and over) is undertaken every month to obtain data on smoking prevalence. The survey is undertaken for the HSE by Ipsos MRBI (as part of their Omnipoll omnibus survey). Respondents are randomly selected by telephone (using random digit dialling from a combination of both landline and mobile phone numbers) and asked a series of questions about smoking behaviours, in addition to background socio-demographic information. The data is weighted by gender, age, social class (socioeconomic group) and region using estimates from the Central Statistics Office.

1.2. Methodological Changes May 2008

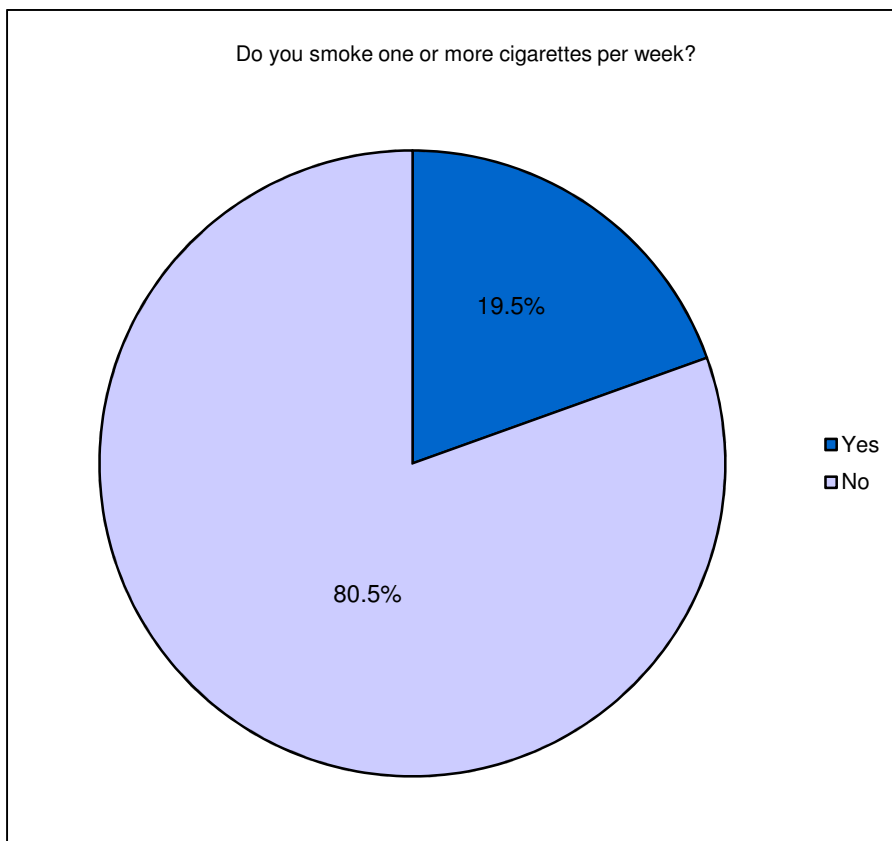
Prior to May 2008, the survey was conducted with respondents via landline telephone numbers only. From May 2008 the data collection methodology was updated to include mobile telephone users. The sample population is now drawn from a combination of both landline and mobile phone numbers. While the questionnaire and quota controls are unchanged, some population subgroups that may previously have been difficult to contact are now better represented in the sample. This methodological change method resulted in an increase in prevalence (of about 3%) from May 2008. The pre-May 2008 data shown in the trend analysis (section 2.6) have therefore been re-calibrated. After seasonally adjusting the data, the recalibration involved a comparison of the data six months prior to the change in method with data collected six months after the change to isolate the impact of the change in methodology. The smoking prevalence figures prior to May 2008 were subsequently adjusted accordingly, on the assumption that the change in sampling approach was the only difference in smoking prevalence between the two 6 month periods.

2. SMOKING PREVALENCE

2.1 Overall Prevalence

Smoking was defined as responding “yes” to the question "Do you smoke one or more cigarettes each week, whether packaged or roll your own?" Figure 2.1 shows that the overall prevalence of cigarette smoking in Ireland in 2014 was 19.5%. This compares to 21.5% for 2013. This equates to over 70,000 fewer smokers in 2014 compared to 2013 (based on CSO figures).

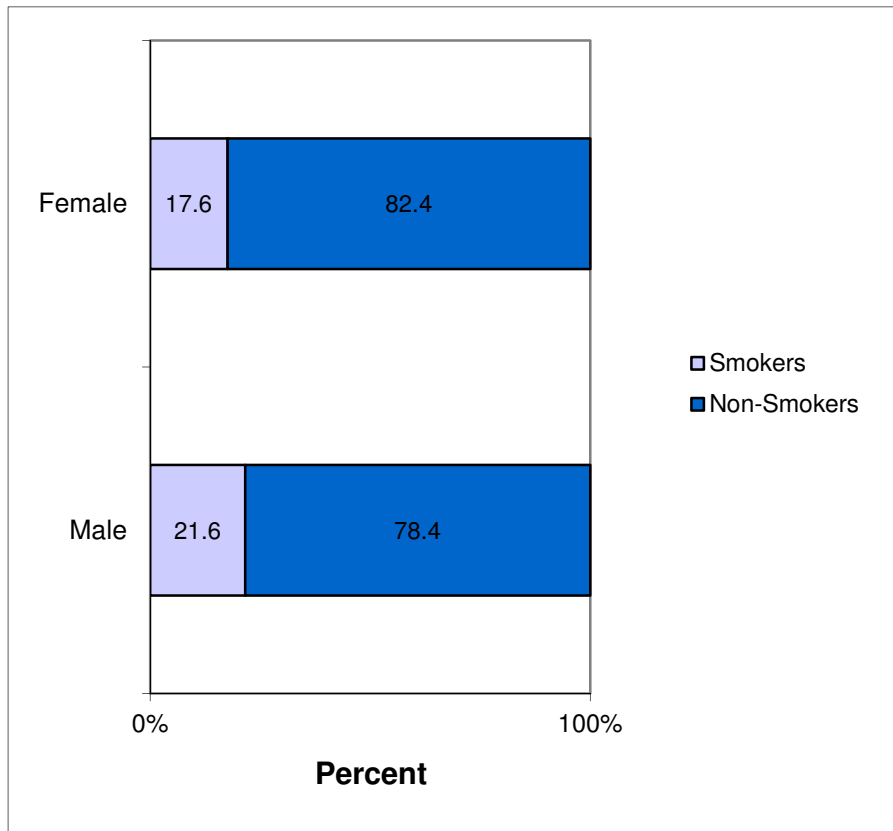
Figure 2.1: Cigarette Smoking Prevalence (January to December 2014)



2.2 Smoking by Gender

Figure 2.2 shows that a higher percentage of men (21.6%) reported being smokers than women (17.6%).

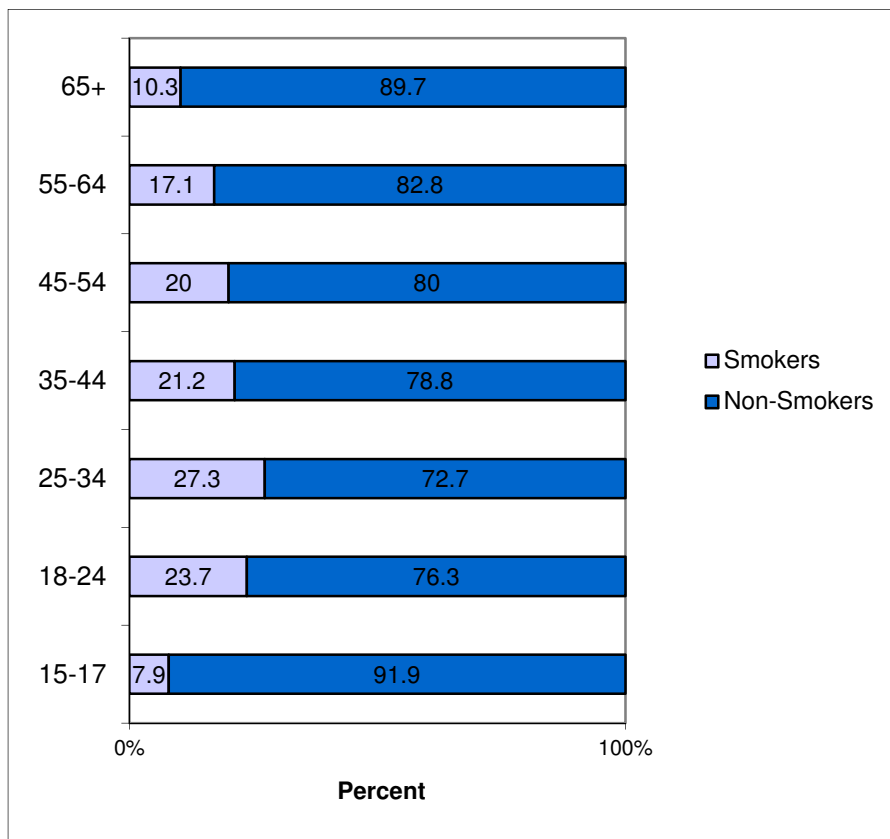
Figure 2.2: Cigarette Smoking Prevalence by Gender (January to December 2014)



2.3 Smoking by Age

From figure 2.3 it can be seen that smoking rates were highest among young adults (18-34 years), reaching 27.3% in the 25-34 year old age group. Prevalence was lowest among the 15-17 age group at 7.9%.

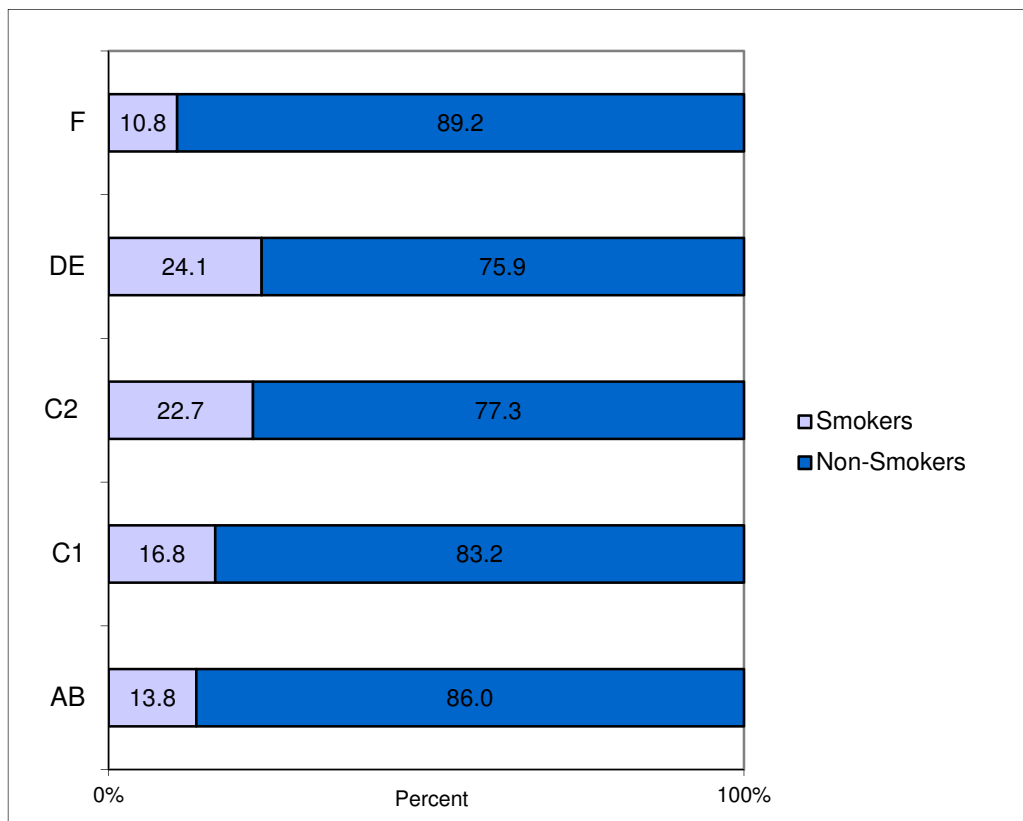
Figure 2.3: Cigarette Smoking prevalence by Age (January to December 2014)



2.4 Smoking by Socioeconomic Group

Figure 2.4 shows that the highest cigarette smoking prevalence rates were in the lower socioeconomic groups (C2 and DE Categories) The lowest smoking rates (10.8% and 13.8%) were among farmers (F) and higher socioeconomic groups.

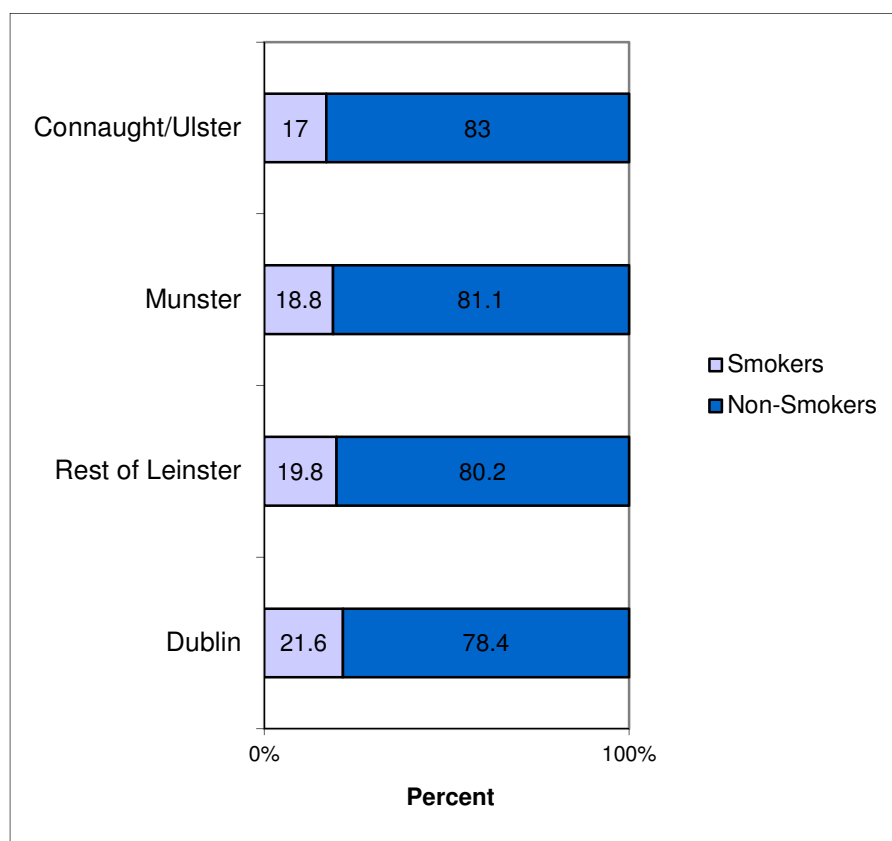
Figure 2.4: Cigarette Smoking prevalence by Socioeconomic Group (January to December 2014)



2.5 Smoking by Region

Figure 2.5 shows cigarette smoking rates by region. Smoking rates were lowest in Connaught/Ulster (17%), with higher rates in Munster (18.8%) and the rest of Leinster (19.8%). Dublin experienced the highest rate at 21.6%.

Figure 2.5: Cigarette Smoking Prevalence by Region (January to December 2014)

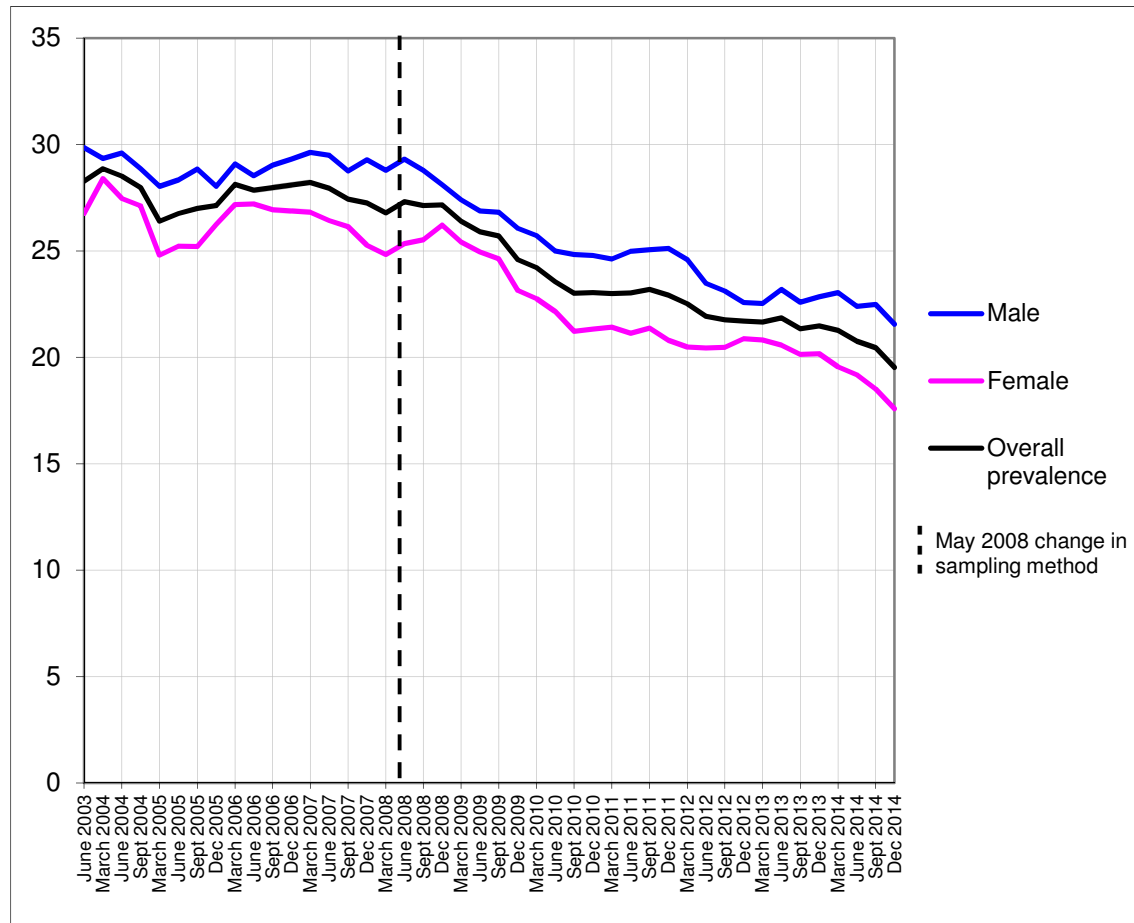


2.6 Overall Trends

An analysis of trends has been undertaken to provide an overview of smoking behaviour between June 2003 and December 2014. Prevalence rates are presented as 12 month moving averages to smooth the data and provide more stable estimates.

Figure 2.6 shows that overall smoking prevalence has declined from 28.28% in June 2003 to 19.53% in December 2014. Since the tracker began, a higher proportion of men have smoked every year. Male and female smoking has declined to 21.55% and 17.59% respectively.

Figure 2.6: Cigarette Smoking Prevalence by Gender (12 month moving average)



3. PROFILE OF SMOKERS

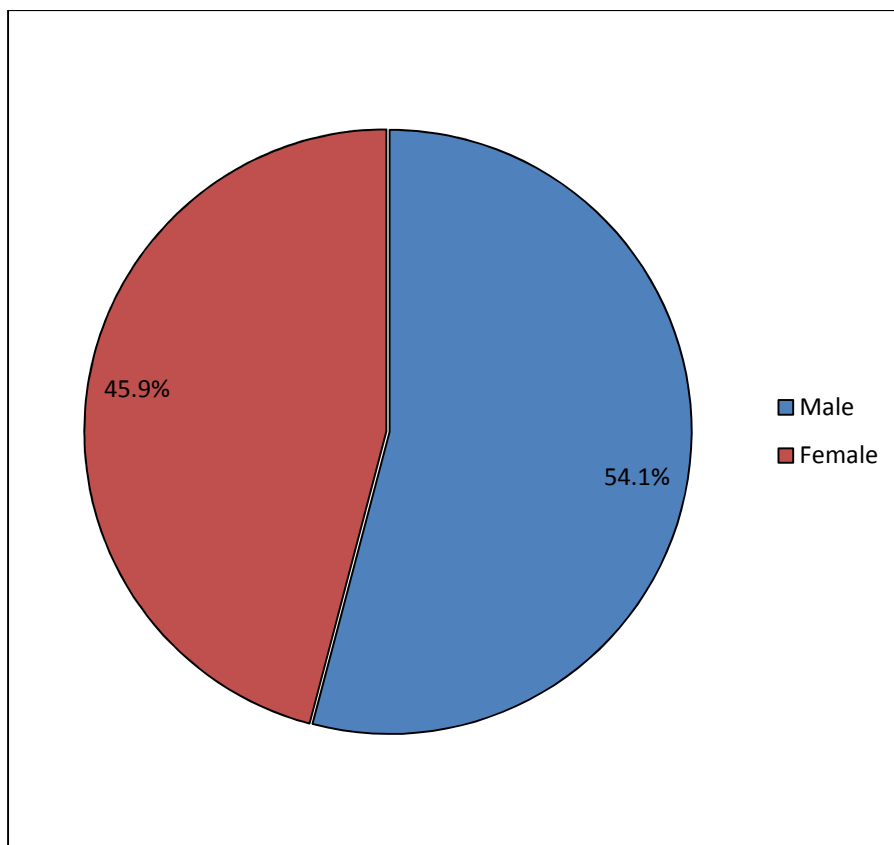
3. Introduction

The following charts focus on smokers only for 2014. These percentages reflect the frequency of the various demographic groups within the population as well as the prevalence of smoking within the demographic groups.

3.1 Smokers by Gender

Figure 3.1 shows the breakdown of smokers by gender for 2014. Over half (54.1%) of the smoking population are male.

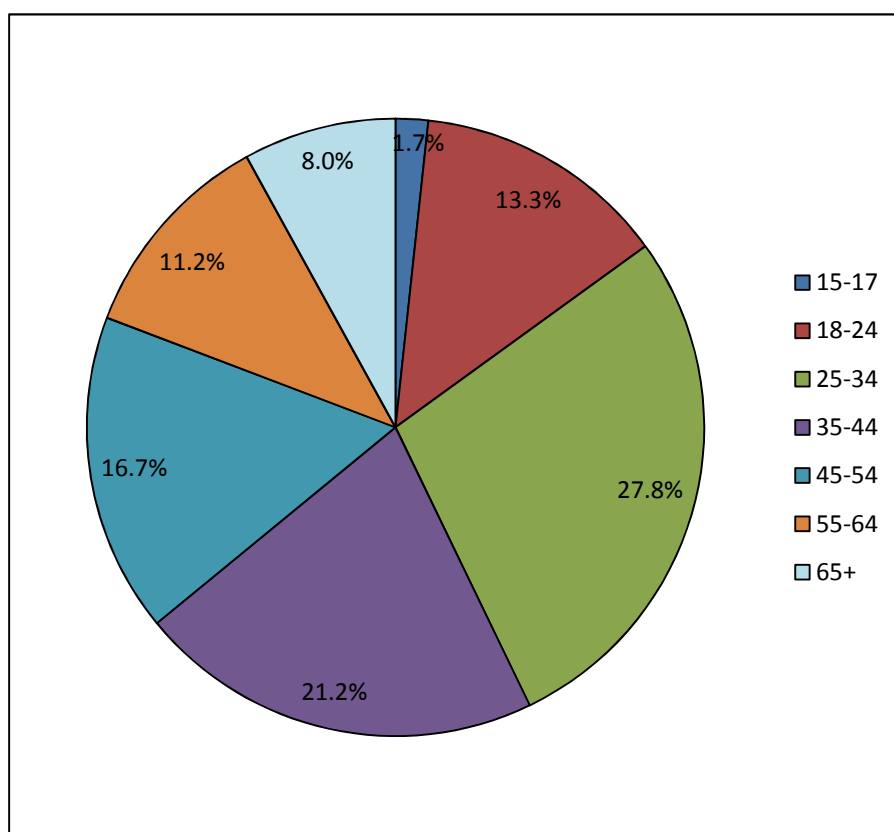
Figure 3.1: Proportion of Cigarette Smokers by Gender (January to December 2014)



3.2 Smokers by Age

Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of smokers across age groups. Just under half of smokers (49%) are aged between 25 and 44 years (25-34 years, 27.8% and 35-44 years, 21.2%). Those aged 55+ years account for 19.2% of the smokers. Less than two percent of the smokers were under 18 years of age. This reflects the smaller population size and the lower smoking prevalence among those aged 15 to 17 years.

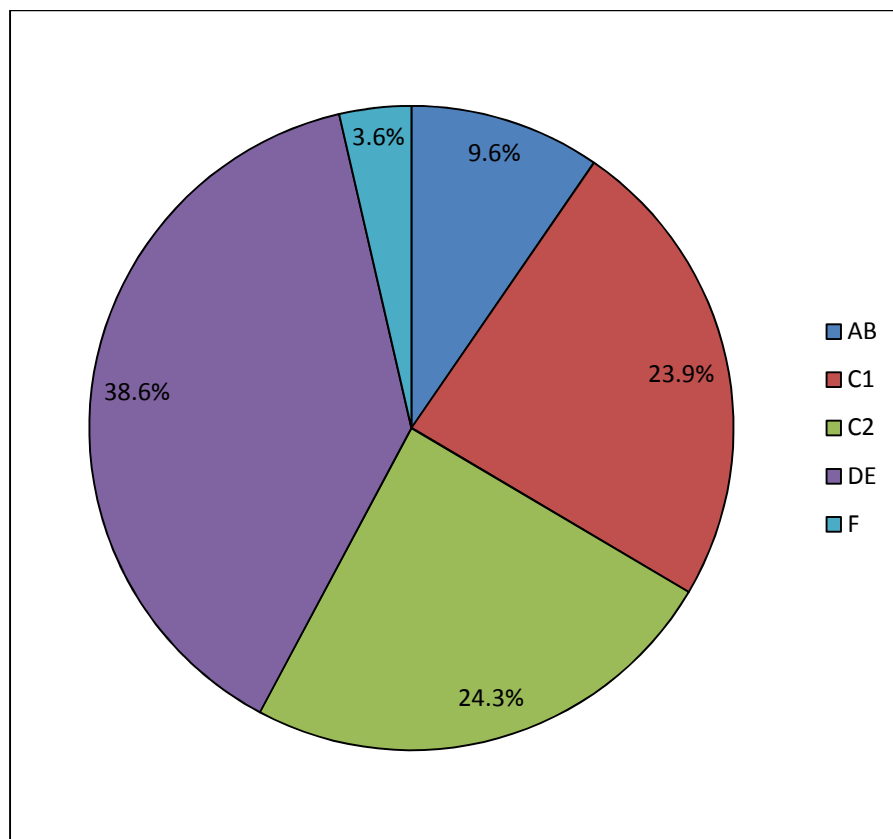
Figure 3.2: Proportion of Cigarette Smokers by Age (January to December 2014)



3.3 Smokers by Socioeconomic Group

Figure 3.3 shows the distribution of smokers by socioeconomic group. The DE group (semi-skilled, unskilled, or unemployed) alone accounts for 38.6% of the smoking population. The C1 (23.9%) and C2 (24.3%) categories each comprise almost a quarter of the smoking population. Smokers who are farmers (3.6%) or those who are in category AB (9.6%) reflect both the smaller size of these demographics and also their lower smoking rates.

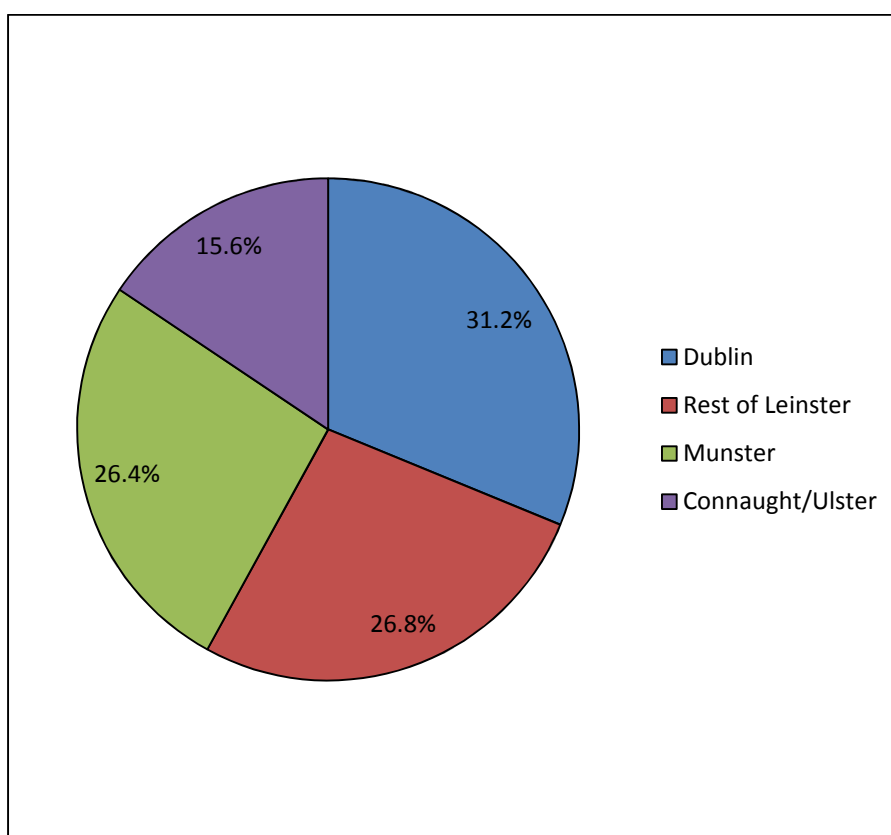
Figure 3.3: Proportion of Cigarette Smokers by Socioeconomic Group (January to December 2014)



3.4 Smokers by Region

The percentages of smokers by region are shown in Figure 3.4. Munster and the rest of Leinster account for similar proportions of smokers, with Dublin showing the highest percentage at 31.2%. The Connaught/Ulster region contains 15.6% of smokers. These smoking patterns are similar to the population distribution by region in Ireland.

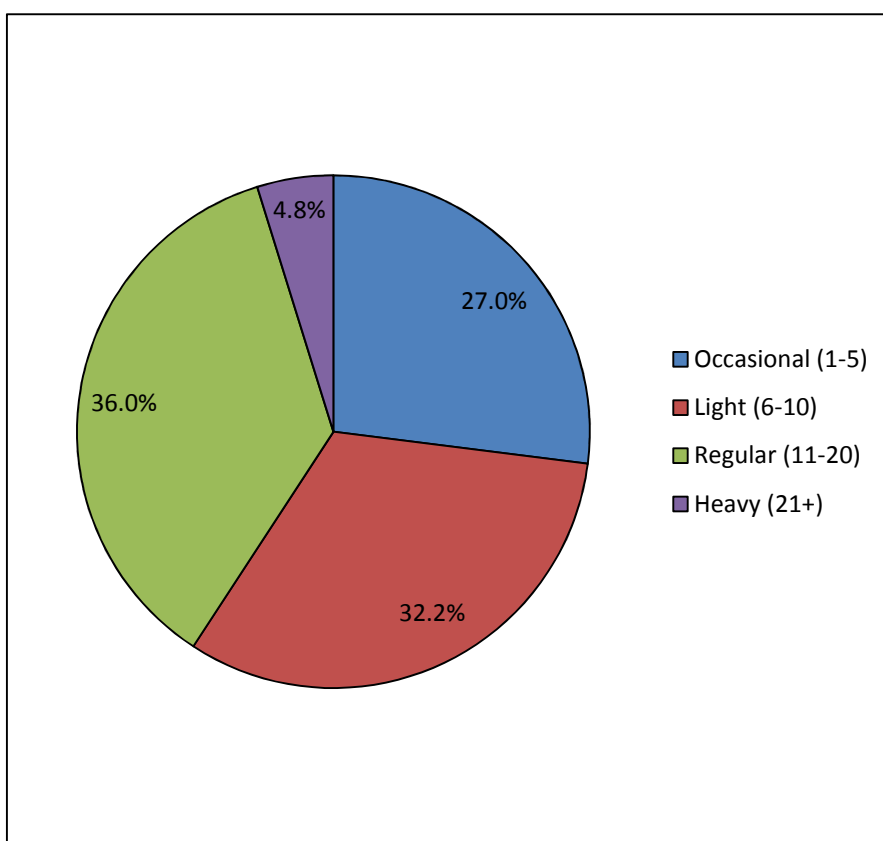
Figure 3.4: Proportion of Cigarette Smokers by Region (January to December 2014)



3.5 Smokers by Daily Consumption

Figure 3.5 depicts the number of cigarettes smoked daily by all reported smokers. Over a third (36.0%) of all smokers indicated that they were regular smokers (11-20 cigarettes per day), while 59.2% were occasional to light smokers (10 or less cigarettes) and 4.8% reported being heavy smokers (21+ cigarettes per day). On average 12.71 cigarettes are smoked per day.

Figure 3.5: Proportion of Smokers by Daily Cigarette Consumption (January to December 2014)



4. REFERENCES

1. World Health Organisation, WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, 2003: Geneva.
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