ADIC
Alcohol and Drug Information Centre

2023
TREND
SURVEY
ON TOBACCO

Annual Trend Survey on
Tobacco Use in Sri Lanka

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in Sri Lanka 2023

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Executive Summary

The Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC), Sri Lanka has been conducting trend surveys on tobacco use annually since 1998. The trend survey analysis (also known as the SPOT Survey) is conducted under the main aim of mapping and tracing current trends of tobacco use across Sri Lanka. This report presents the findings of the trend survey for the year 2023 which was aimed at determining trends of tobacco use across the country, thereby assisting policymakers in formulating effective tobacco policies that aid reduction and prevention of tobacco use.

Data was collected through a survey administered among the population of males above 15 years of age across five selected districts in Sri Lanka, namely, Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy, Kurunegala and Jaffna. Data analysis and results on tobacco usage patterns were formulated based on 1236 valid responses obtained from the survey participants. From the survey population, 25.5% (n=315) were current smokers.

The sample was divided into three age groups for analysis, namely, 15-24 years, 25-39 years and 40 years and above. The majority of current smokers reported that they used tobacco on a daily basis. The highest tobacco usage rates were reported from the age category 40 years and above, from which 26.7% were current smokers.

Cigarette was the most prominently used tobacco product among the majority of the current smokers, regardless of their age group, district and occupational sector. When considering the district-wise comparison, Kurunegala reported the highest tobacco usage rate (32.2%), while Jaffna reported the lowest rate (20.2%). Initiation of tobacco use has occurred mostly during the age 18-20 years (36.3%), and the most common type of tobacco product consumed at initiation was also cigarettes. Majority of the initiations have occurred at social gatherings such as big matches (45.0%) and parties (16.4%), which shows that peer influence and pleasurable environment had mostly accounted for tobacco initiation.

From the survey participants, 35.9% had been successful in quitting tobacco use at the time of administering the survey. The reasons for quitting tobacco use were different among the three age groups. Perceiving tobacco use as a purposeless behavior and health concerns were the two most common factors for quitting, while financial constraints were also reported as a prominent factor. To build on this positive trend, it is essential to further disseminate knowledge about the health, social, and economic impacts of tobacco use, encouraging more individuals to quit the habit. Furthermore, a notable 19.5% of the survey participants between 15-21 years of age were identified to be current smokers, highlighting a concerning prevalence of tobacco sales to underaged individuals in the country despite legal prohibitions. This finding underscores the importance of addressing this issue effectively.

The survey findings emphasize the need for further implementing tobacco tax indexation, pricing policies and effective tobacco prevention strategies to reduce tobacco initiations and to build on the positive trend of declining tobacco use within the country. The survey also provides a platform for further recommendations on tobacco prevention including banning single stick cigarette sales, banning tobacco sales within a 100-meter radius of educational institutes and effective implementation of the ban on sales of tobacco products for underaged persons.

1. Introduction

Being a successive nation in tobacco control, Sri Lanka has taken several steps to control the prevalence of tobacco in the country. Sri Lanka was the first in the South Asian region and the fourth in the world to ratify the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2003.[1] Correspondingly, the National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) Act was established in 2006 to enact strong legal aspects for tobacco prevention in Sri Lanka. Some of the measures taken to control tobacco use includes banning tobacco sales and promotions for youth under 21 years of age, banning tobacco advertising, promotions and sponsorships, and implementing a mandatory health warning covering 80% of cigarette packs. In the year 2020, the prevalence of smoking in Sri Lanka has been reported as 9.1%,[2] indicating a declining trend over the years resulting from Sri Lanka's commitment to tobacco prevention.

However, tobacco use remains a pervasive global health challenge negatively affecting both individuals and societies as a whole. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco use is responsible for approximately 8 million annual deaths globally,[3] while smoking accounts for the death of approximately 50 individuals per day in Sri Lanka.[4] Even at present, a significant proportion of the country's population amounting to approximately 1.5 million still use cigarettes. Moreover, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death worldwide, while accounting for 83% of all deaths in Sri Lanka, indicating a significant health burden to the country's health system. Furthermore, smoking lies among the four major risk factors which contribute to NCDs in Sri Lanka.[5] Additionally, Sri Lankans spend approximately 520 million rupees on cigarettes per day, further intensifying the prevailing economic hardships within communities.

Under such circumstances, increasing tobacco taxes can be identified as the most important step towards reducing tobacco use as well as the economic and social harm that it causes. As recommended by the WHO, significantly increasing tobacco excise taxes and prices has been identified as the single most effective and cost-effective strategy for reducing tobacco usage and associated harm.[6] It is a significant revenue generation measure for the government, while simultaneously ensuring the decrease in tobacco affordability to protect people's health. Furthermore, there is a need to address the issues related to tobacco use among individuals to improve their awareness and protect themselves from tobacco harm and industry interferences. Therefore, the year 2023 tobacco trend survey findings put emphasis on the need to implement and facilitate necessary policy initiatives, awareness programs and community interventions in order to empower people to identify the harm and negative impact of tobacco use on their overall well-being.

1.1 Objectives

- To determine different trends of tobacco use within the country in terms of different products, age groups and districts.
- To analyse the trends of tobacco use and compare the results with surveys conducted in previous years.

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[1] https://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2020/01/06/tobacco-smoking-in-sri-lanka-going-the-last-mile/
[2] The Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) 2020
[3] https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-no-tobacco-day
[4] https://adicsrilanka.org/tobacco-fact-sheet-2020/
[5] World Health Organization (WHO) – NCD Country Profile, Sri Lanka
[6] https://www.who.int/activities/raising-taxes-on-tobacco

- To identify the underlying attitudes and reasons for tobacco use among different age groups and districts.
- To determine the age of initiating tobacco use.

2. Methodology

2.1 Survey design and setting

The trend survey was conducted as a cross-sectional survey, which spanned across five districts in Sri Lanka, namely, Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy, Kurunegala and Jaffna in the year 2023, due to financial constraints faced as a consequence of the severe economic challenges in the country. The selected survey locations incorporated urban and rural populations as well as all ethnicities living in the country.

2.2 Survey population

The male population of 15 years of age and above living in the selected districts in Sri Lanka were included in the survey. Nonconsenting participants and participants with hearing or speech impairment were excluded from the survey.

2.3 Sample size and sampling

The total sample size used for the trend survey was 1340 survey participants from all five districts. The trend survey participants were recruited using a multi-stage sample design, that incorporated stratified and systematic sampling methods.

In the next stage of sampling, age was divided into three sub-groups as 15-24 years, 25-39 years, and 40 years and above, to obtain a representative sample of males above 15 years. Since it was found from the previous surveys that the first two age groups have lower usage, it was purposively oversampled. Therefore, the planned sample allocation for the chosen age groups were 40%, 40% and 20% respectively. This was determined based on population figures from the census and statistics. However exact sample size might have had slight variations during the survey.

2.4 Data collection and analysis

Trend survey data were collected by trained interviewers using a validated questionnaire, in September 2023. The ADIC trend survey is a unique survey that approaches participants in public places of the selected districts. This is to ensure high coverage of males who have a tendency to use tobacco, so that results will not be an underestimate of actual tobacco usage rates in the country. The questionnaire was prepared in

both native (Sinhala and Tamil) languages and was administered in the field according to the language preference of the survey participants. The first few questions were developed for gathering demographic information of the participants. Few questions were reserved for the contemporary issues directly affecting tobacco use. The rest of them were composite questions which were developed to obtain information regarding tobacco usage patterns.

Data collected by the survey was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and figures that represent trends were compiled using Microsoft Excel.

Trends of tobacco use were analysed in different aspects and the following terminologies were defined and used for this purpose. Three groups, namely, current smokers, last 30-day abstainers and lifetime abstainers were identified. **'Current smokers'** were defined as individuals who have consumed tobacco within the past 30 days at the time the survey was administered, while **'last 30-day abstainers'** were individuals who had consumed tobacco all long, however, have abstained during the past 30 days at the time of the survey. Individuals who have never consumed tobacco in their lifetime were referred to as **'lifetime abstainers'**. Apart from initiation and cessation, the rest of the survey results were obtained based on the responses of current smokers. Therefore, the key analysis of this report is based on the valid responses of current smokers.

3. Results

3.1 Geographical distribution of the survey participants

A total of 1340 responses from males aged 15 years and above were received for the trend survey. However, the response rate for each question may vary from the overall sample. A summary of the status of responses from all five districts is stated below.

Table 1: Geographical distribution of the survey participants

District	Province	Age group			Total
		15-24 years	25-39 years	40 years and above	
Colombo	Western	97	107	61	265
		21.8%	20.0%	16.9%	19.8%
Gampaha	Western	102	116	78	296
		23.0%	21.7%	21.5%	22.1%
Kandy	Central	101	96	63	260
		22.7%	18.0%	17.4%	19.4%
Kurunegala	North-Western	87	116	64	267
		19.6%	21.7%	17.7%	19.9%
Jaffna	Northern	57	99	96	252
		12.8%	18.5%	26.5%	18.8%
Total		444	534	362	1340
		33.1%	39.9%	27.0%	100.0%

3.2   Demographic Information of the survey participants

This section consists of the demographic information of the survey participants. It represents the distribution of the participants based on the age categories, level of education and occupational sector.

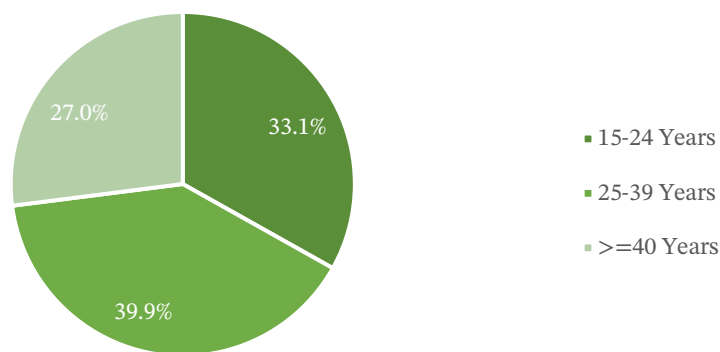### 3.2.1 Age category of the survey participants

Figure 1: Age category of the survey participants

From the survey participants, the majority (39.9%) belonged to the age group 25-39 years. Furthermore, 33.1% were in the age group 15-24 years and 27% were in the age group 40 years and above. These figures showed a slight deviation from the initially allocated figures, as expected.

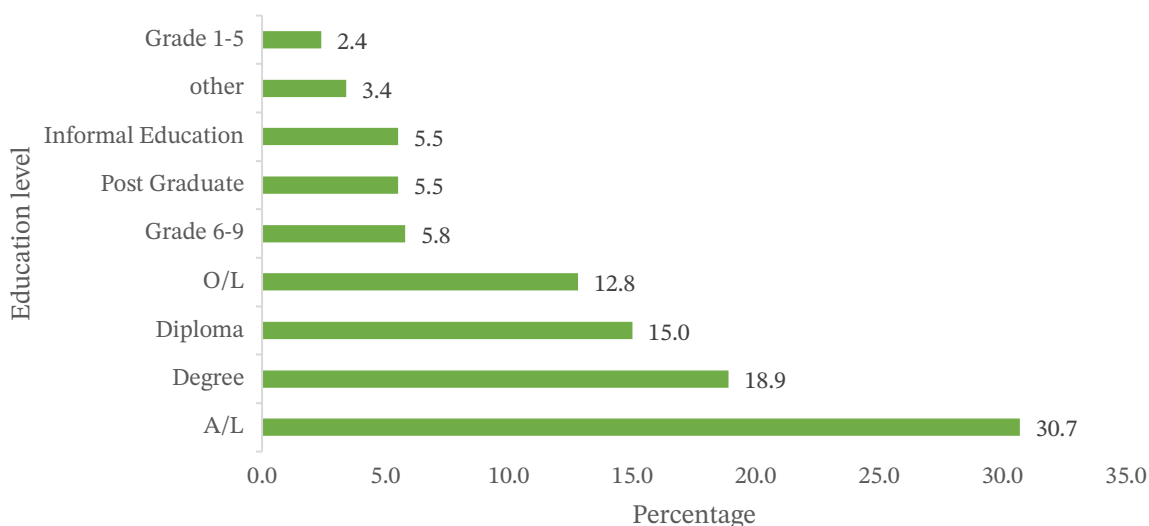### 3.2.2 Education level of the survey participants

Figure 2: Education level of the survey participants

The survey participants belonged to various education levels. The highest percentage of participants (30.7%) had completed G.C.E. Advanced Level (A/L), while the second highest percentage (18.9%) were degree holders. A minority consisting of 2.4% of the survey participants have only completed their primary education (grade 1-5).

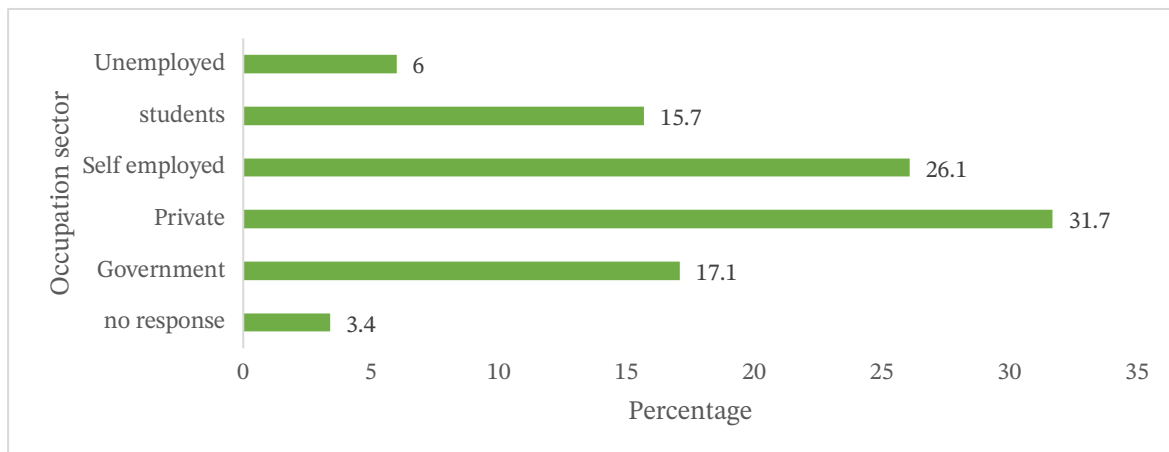### 3.2.3 Occupation sector of the survey participants

Figure 3: Occupation sector of the survey participants

The highest percentage of the survey participants were employed in the private sector (32.0%), while the second highest percentage were self-employed (26.0%). From the participants, 17.0% were in the government sector, 16.0% were students and 6.0% were unemployed.

3.3   Results obtained from the survey

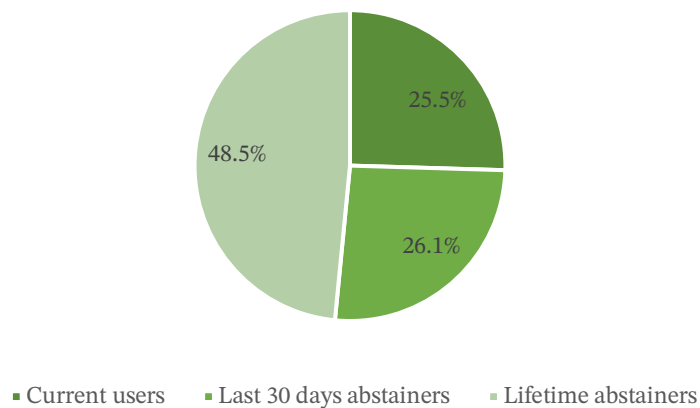### 3.3.1 Status of tobacco usage among the survey participants

Figure 4: Status of tobacco usage

According to the findings of the survey, majority of the survey participants were lifetime abstainers (48.5%). The current smokers and last 30-day abstainers amounted to 25.5% and 26.1% respectively.
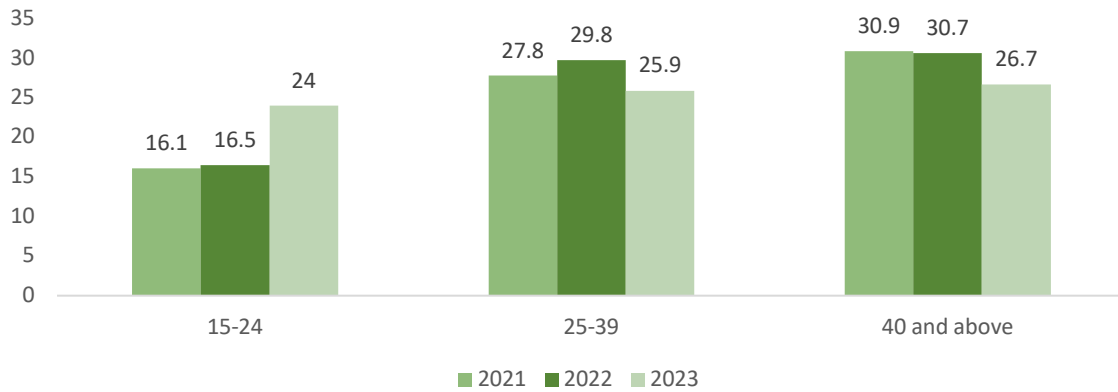
Figure 5: Comparison of tobacco use within the 3 age groups in the last 3 years

The above figure shows a comparison of tobacco use in the years 2021, 2022 and 2023. A slight increase in tobacco use can be observed in the three age groups in 2023, when compared to the two previous years.
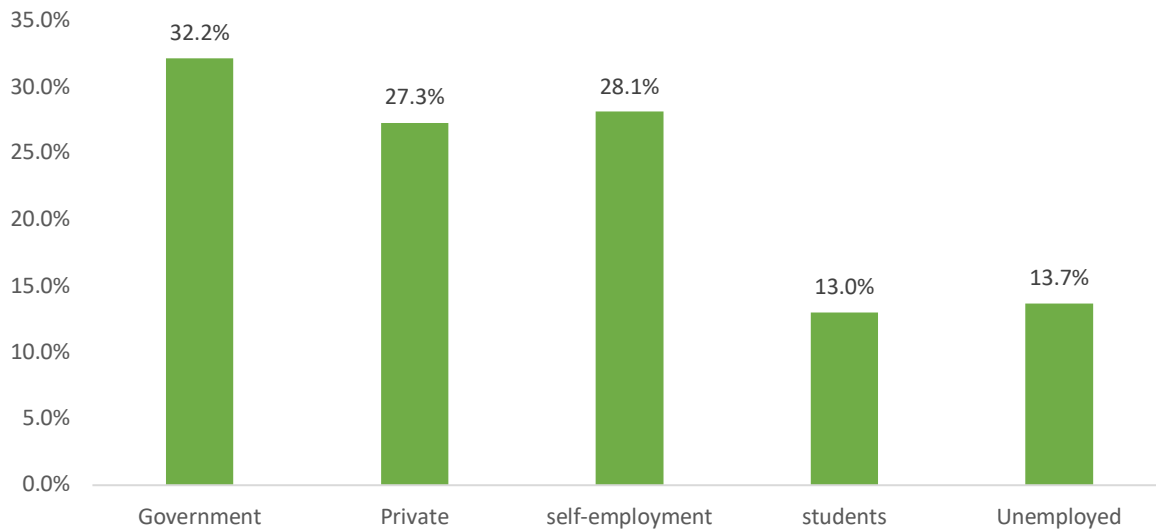

Figure 6: Tobacco use among survey participants in different occupational sectors

The highest tobacco use was reported by the participants in the government sector (32.2%), while students reported the lowest rate (13.0%).
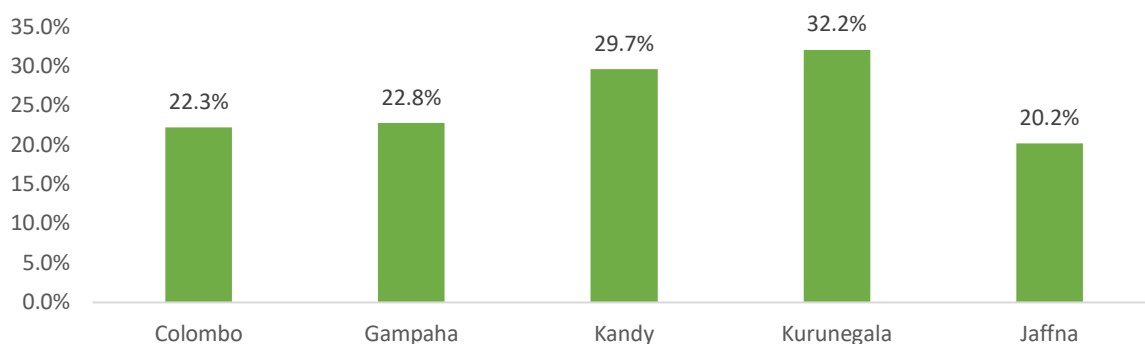

Figure 7: Status of tobacco use in the selected districts

When considering the districts included in the survey, the highest percentage of tobacco users was reported from Kurunegala district (32.2%) while the second highest percentage was observed in Kandy (29.7%). The lowest percentage of tobacco users was observed in Jaffna district (20.2%).

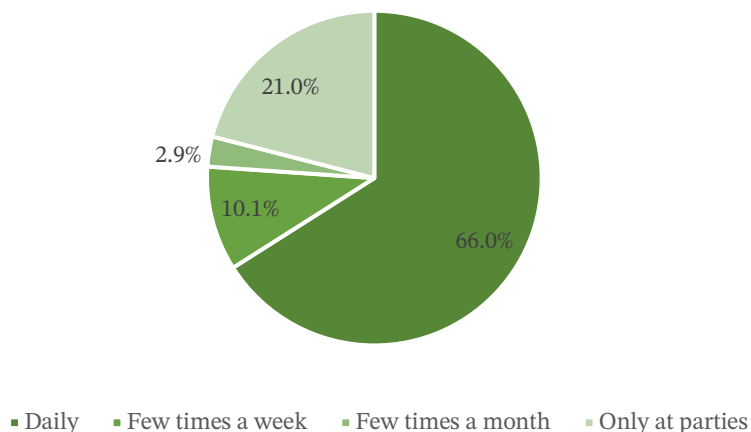## 3.3.2 Frequency of tobacco use among the survey participants

Figure 8: Frequency of tobacco use among current smokers

It was observed that the majority of current smokers were daily users (66.0%) while the lowest percentage of respondents (2.9%) used tobacco few times a month. From the current smokers, 21.0% reported that they use tobacco only at parties, while 10.1% of the users consumed tobacco a few times a week.
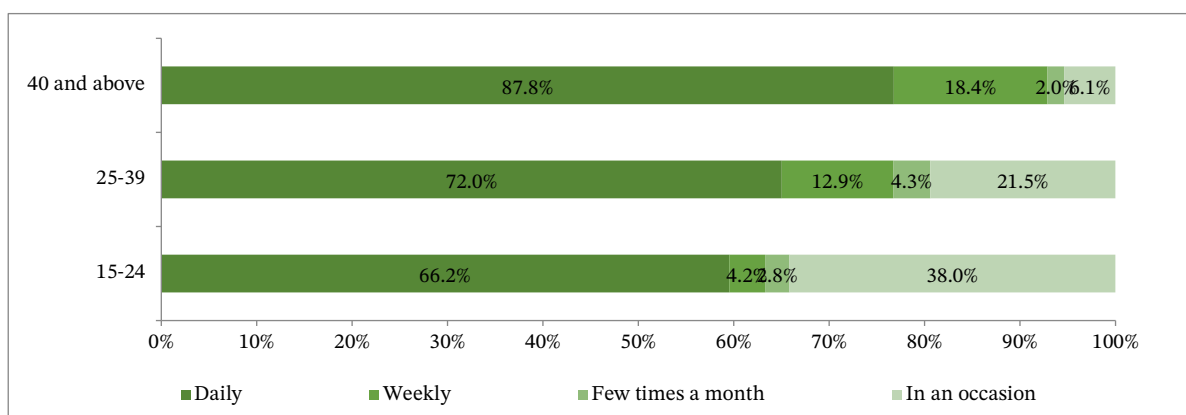

Figure 9: Frequency of tobacco use within the age categories

In all three age groups, majority of the current smokers were daily tobacco users. The age group 40 years and above showed the highest percentage of daily tobacco use (87.8%).
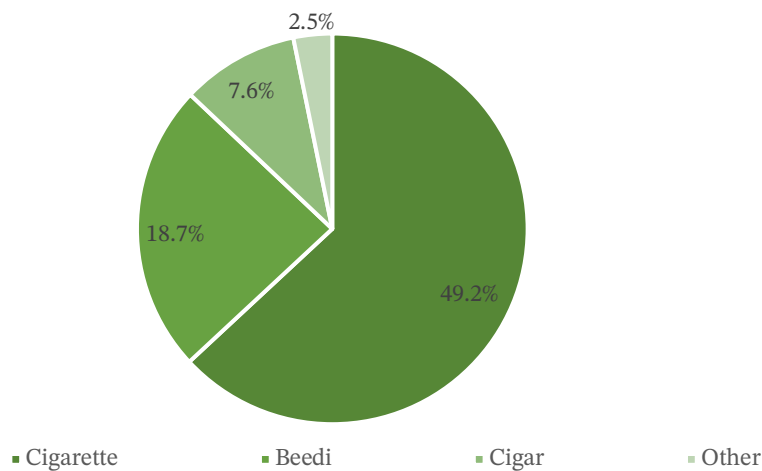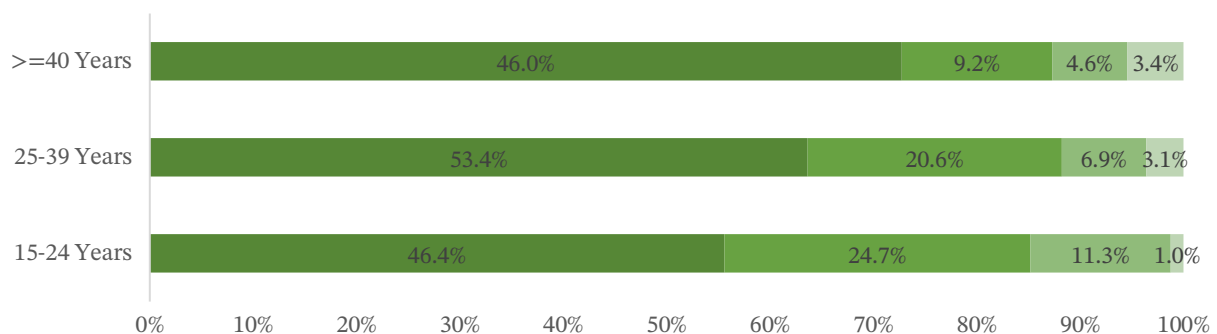
3.3.3 Types of tobacco products consumed

Figure 10: Types of tobacco products consumed by all current smokers

Among the current smokers, majority have reported the commonly used tobacco product as cigarettes (49.2%). Beedi was the second most consumed tobacco product (18.7%), while very few percentages reported the use of cigars (7.6%) and other types of tobacco products (2.5%).

	15-24 Years	25-39 Years	>=40 Years
Cigarette	46.4%	53.4%	46.0%
Beedi	24.7%	20.6%	9.2%
Cigar	11.3%	6.9%	4.6%
Other	1.0%	3.1%	3.4%

Figure 11: Types of tobacco products used by different age groups

Cigarettes show the highest usage in all 3 age groups (15-24 years: 46.4%, 25-39 years: 53.4% and 40 years and above: 46.0%). Beedi was the second most consumed tobacco product in all three age groups (15-24 years: 24.7%, 25-39 years: 20.6% and 40 years and above: 9.2%). The usage of cigars and other types of tobacco products were comparatively low.
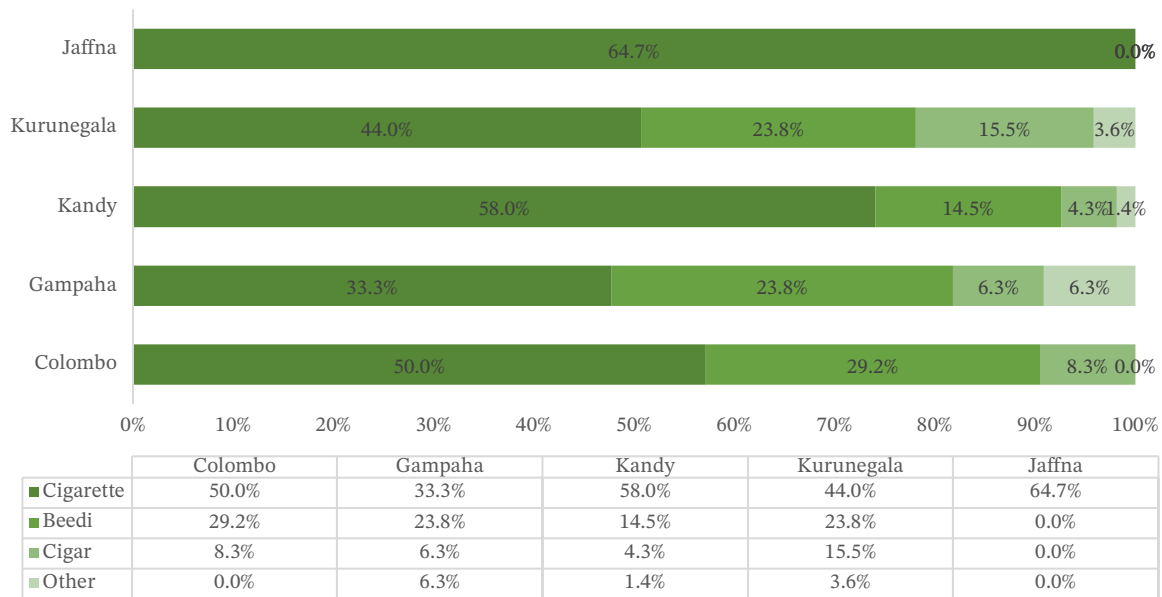
	Colombo	Gampaha	Kandy	Kurunegala	Jaffna
■Cigarette	50.0%	33.3%	58.0%	44.0%	64.7%
■Beedi	29.2%	23.8%	14.5%	23.8%	0.0%
■Cigar	8.3%	6.3%	4.3%	15.5%	0.0%
■Other	0.0%	6.3%	1.4%	3.6%	0.0%

Figure 12: Types of tobacco products used by current smokers in survey locations

Cigarette was the most used tobacco product in all five survey locations, while beedi, cigars and other tobacco products showed a comparatively low usage rate.
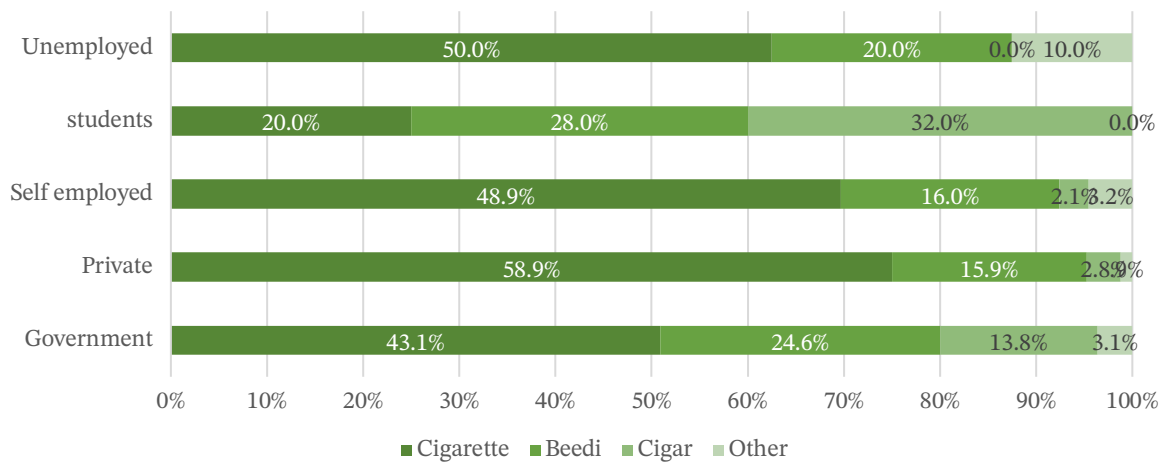

Figure 13: Usage of tobacco products by current consumers in different occupational sectors

Cigarette was the most commonly used product among the current consumers of all occupational categories, while beedi was the second most commonly used product.

3.3.4 Tobacco initiation
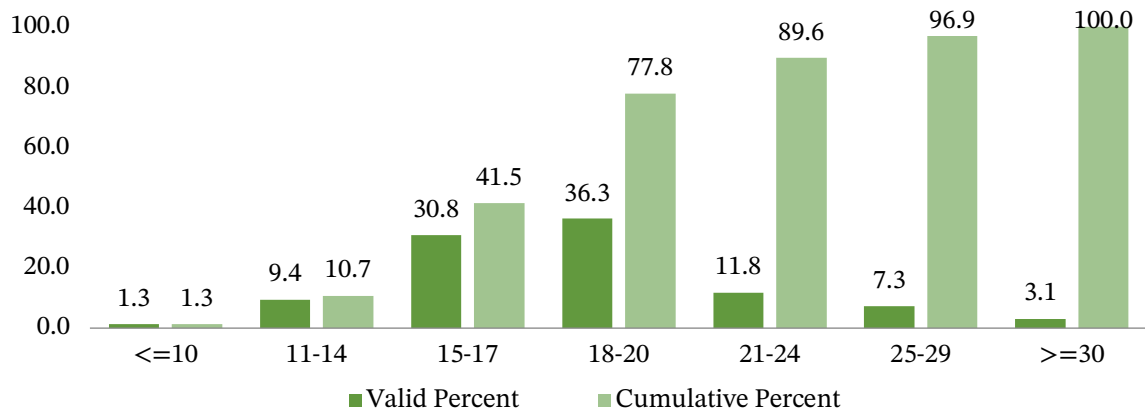
Figure 14: Tobacco initiation age

The highest percentage of initiations (36.3%) was reported at the age range of 18-20 years.
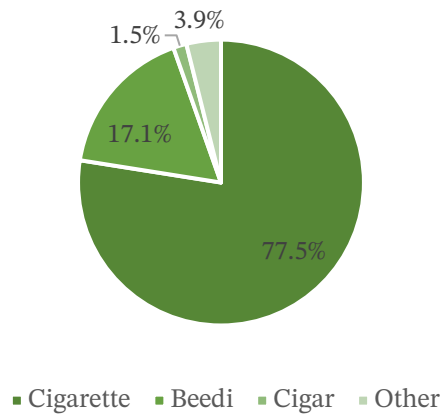

Figure 15: Type of tobacco product used at initiation

At the time of initiation, the highest percentage of users (77.5%) had used cigarettes, while the second highest percentage of users (17.1%) had used beedi. Usage of cigar and other tobacco products is comparatively low.
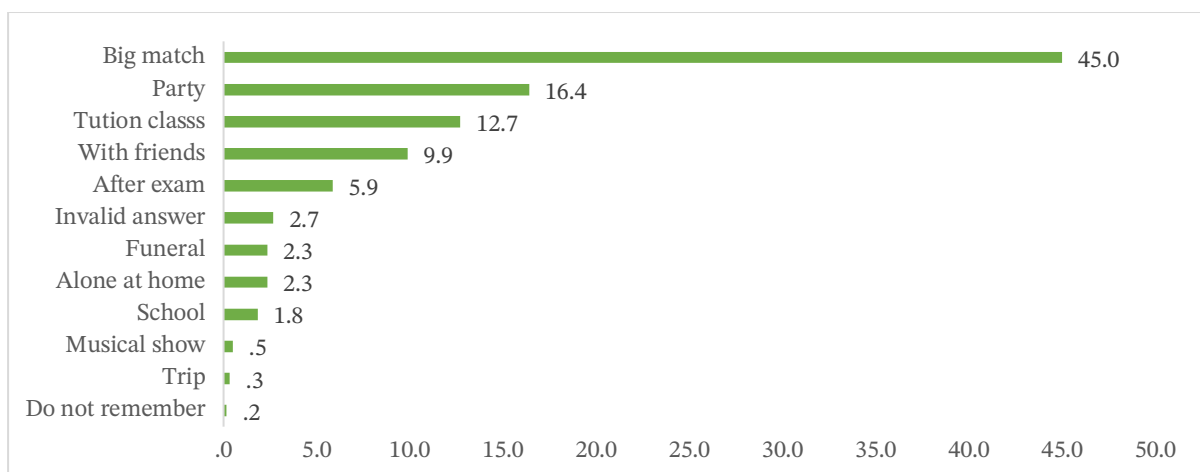

Figure 16: Tobacco initiation occasion

The highest percentage of survey participants (45.0%) had reported that initiation of tobacco use occurred at big matches, while parties was another common occasion which caused onset of tobacco use among 16.4% of the survey participants.

3.3.5 Cessation of tobacco use
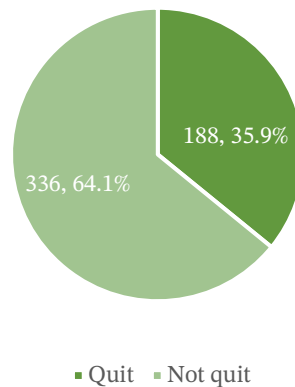
Figure 17: Quitting tobacco use

From the survey participants, 35.9% had been successful in quitting tobacco use at the time of administering the survey.
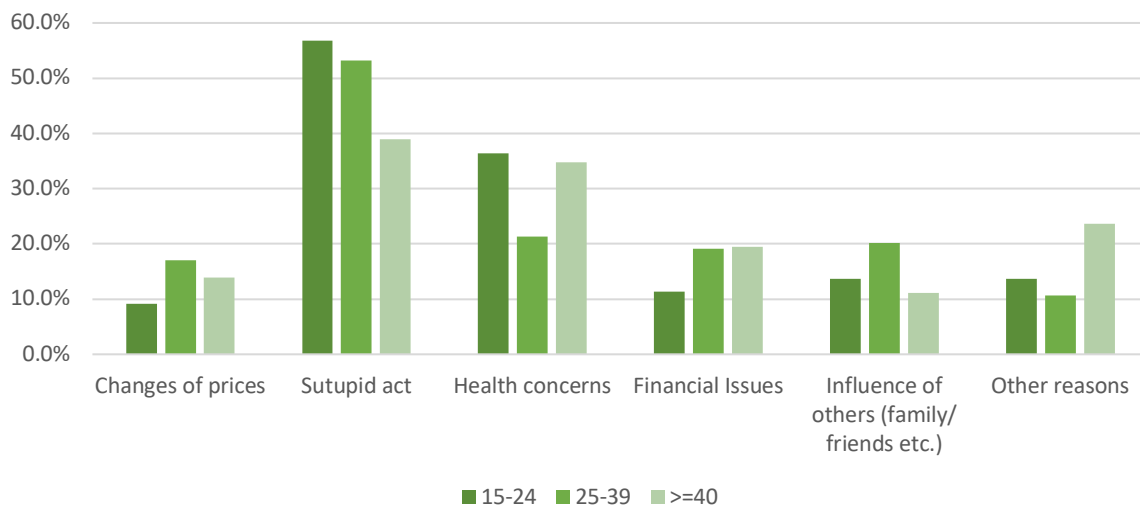
Figure 18: Reasons for quitting tobacco use

During the survey, the survey participants in all three age groups were inquired about the reasons which caused them to change their tobacco usage pattern in the six months prior to the survey. Perceiving tobacco usage as a useless behaviour and health concerns were presented as reasons by the majority of the survey participants, while financial matters and family influence were also reported as important reasons for the change in tobacco use.

3.3.6 Expenditure on tobacco

Table 2: Monthly expenditure on tobacco among different age groups

	No. of respondents	Median (in rupees)	Interquartile Range (in rupees)	Min -Max (in rupees)
All current smokers				
15-24	78	2662.50	9325	90-36600
25-39	96	3675.00	6470	90-81000
40 and above	71	5000.00	9750	125-75000
Daily cigarette smokers				
15-24	25	10500.00	11280	2000-36600
25-39	39	4800.00	7750	910-60000
40 and above	27	11250.00	14250	1800-75000

Table 4 provides detailed information on the monthly expenditure for all current smokers and daily cigarette smokers among the three age groups.

Median value for the monthly expenditure is highest in the age group 40 years and above (Rs. 5000.00), while it is lowest in the age group 15-24 years (Rs.2, 662.50).
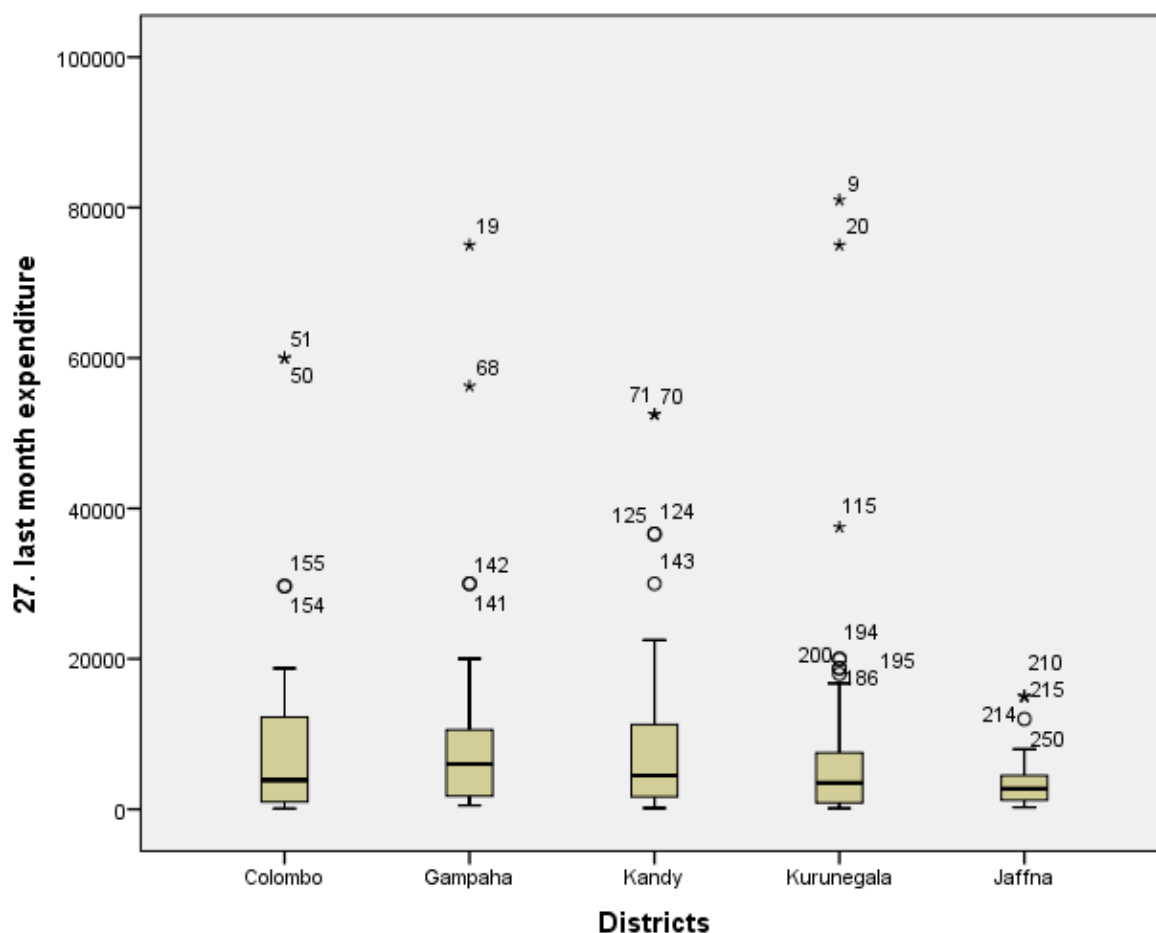
Figure 19: Monthly expenditure on tobacco for all users
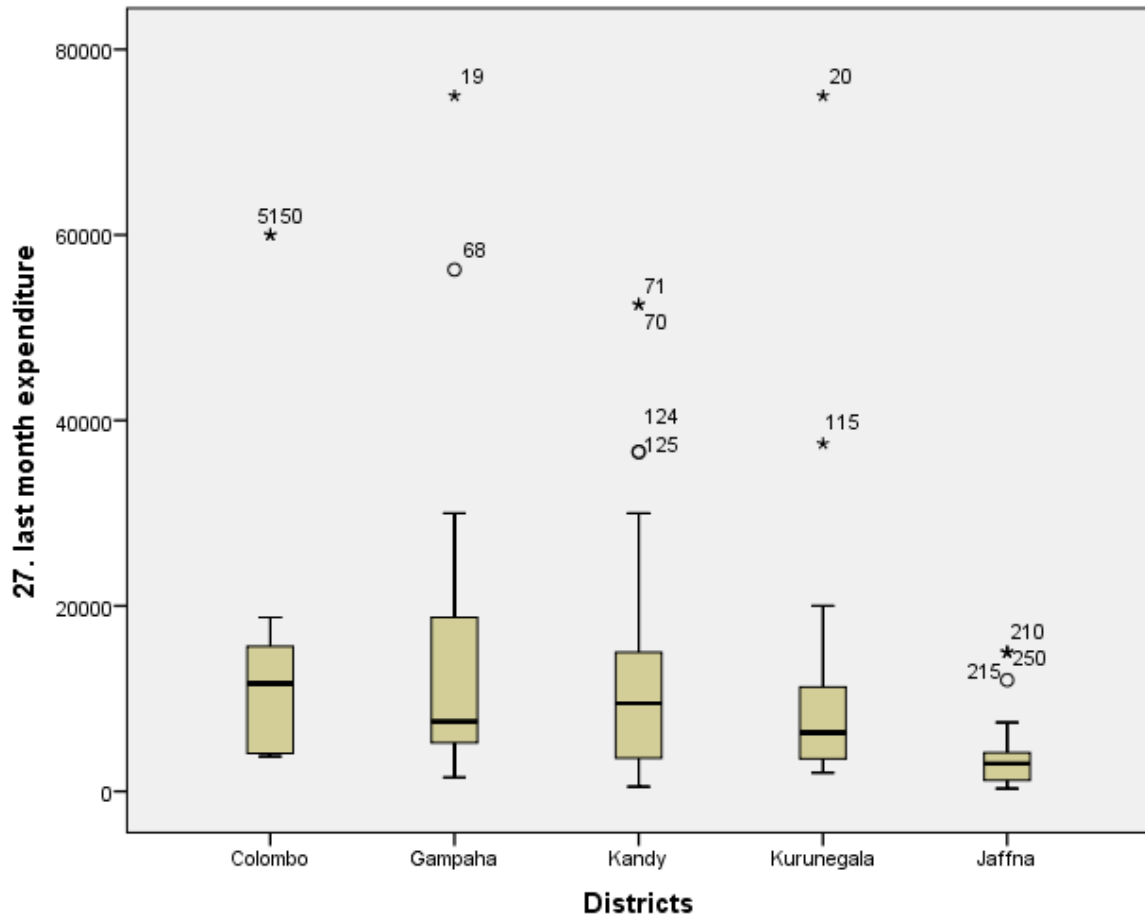
Figure 20: Monthly expenditure on cigarettes by daily users

3.3.7 Miscellaneous results

- current smokers
- last 30 days abstainers
- life time abstainers
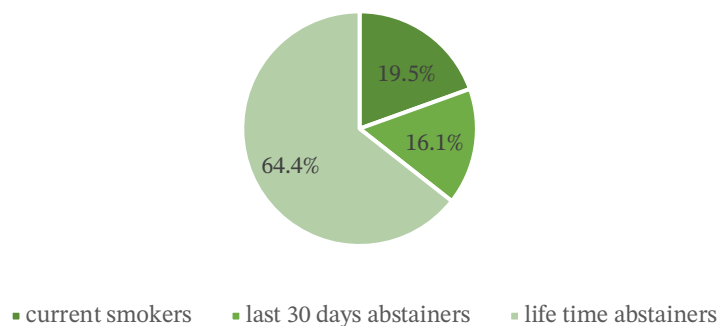
Figure 21: Status of smoking among current smokers below 21 years of age

Through the results obtained from the survey it was identified that there is a percentage of 19.5% between 15-21 years of age who are current smokers, even though the majority (64.4%) of this age group are lifetime abstainers.
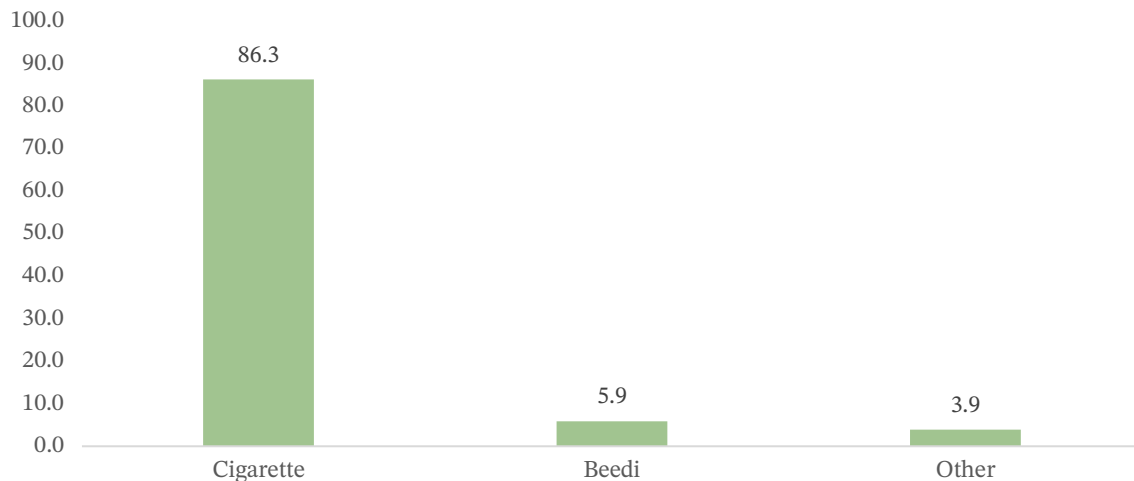
Figure 22: Type of tobacco products used by current smokers below 21 years of age

The majority (86.3%) of the current smokers between 15-21 years of age have reported that they use cigarettes, while the second most used tobacco product among this group of survey participants was reported as beedi (5.9%). Usage of other tobacco products is comparatively low among this age group (1.3%).
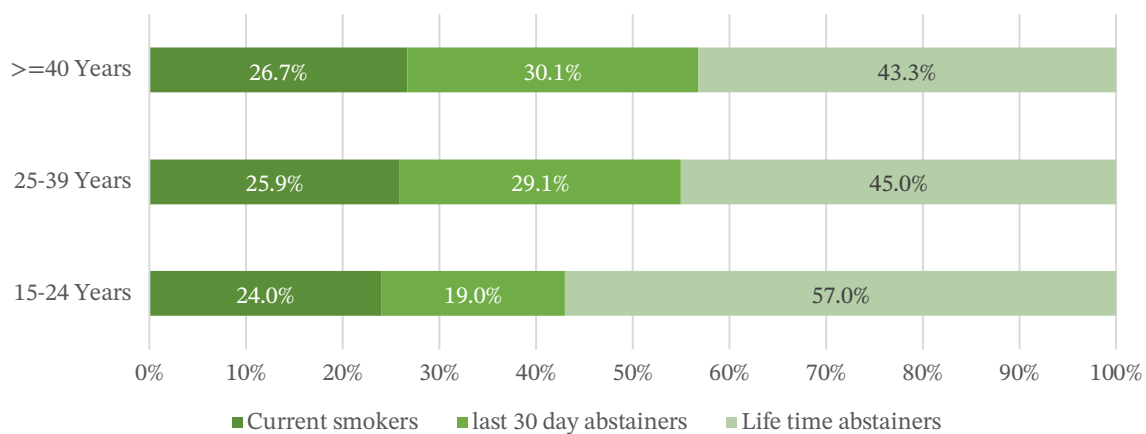

Figure 23: Usage of tobacco products within the three age groups

In all three age categories, lifetime abstainers were prominent. From the three age groups, the highest percentage of lifetime abstainers was present in the age group 15-24 years (57.0%). Current smokers were highest in the age group 40 years and above (26.7%).
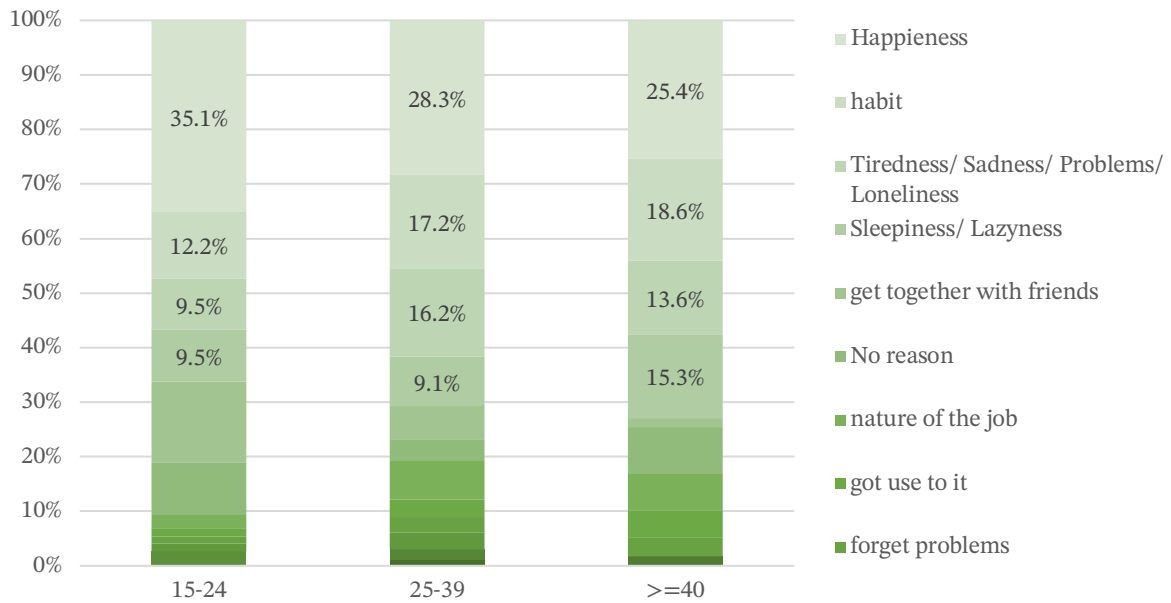
Figure 24: Reasons for smoking given by current smokers among the three age groups

The graph shows that the majority in all three age groups have stated that they consume tobacco as it provides them happiness. A considerable percentage also consume tobacco as a habit. The reasons given by the respondents seem to be different from one another, making them controversial.

Figure 25: Trend of smoking within the last 10 years

An overall decreasing trend in tobacco use can be observed during the last ten years.
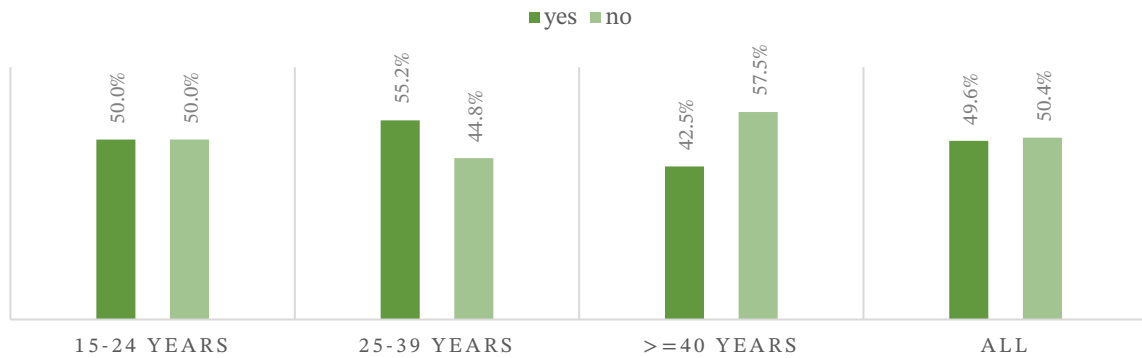
Figure 26: Smoking in the presence of others

During the survey, the current smokers were inquired about whether they have engaged in smoking in the presence of others. According to the obtained data, a majority of current smokers do not smoke in the presence of others.
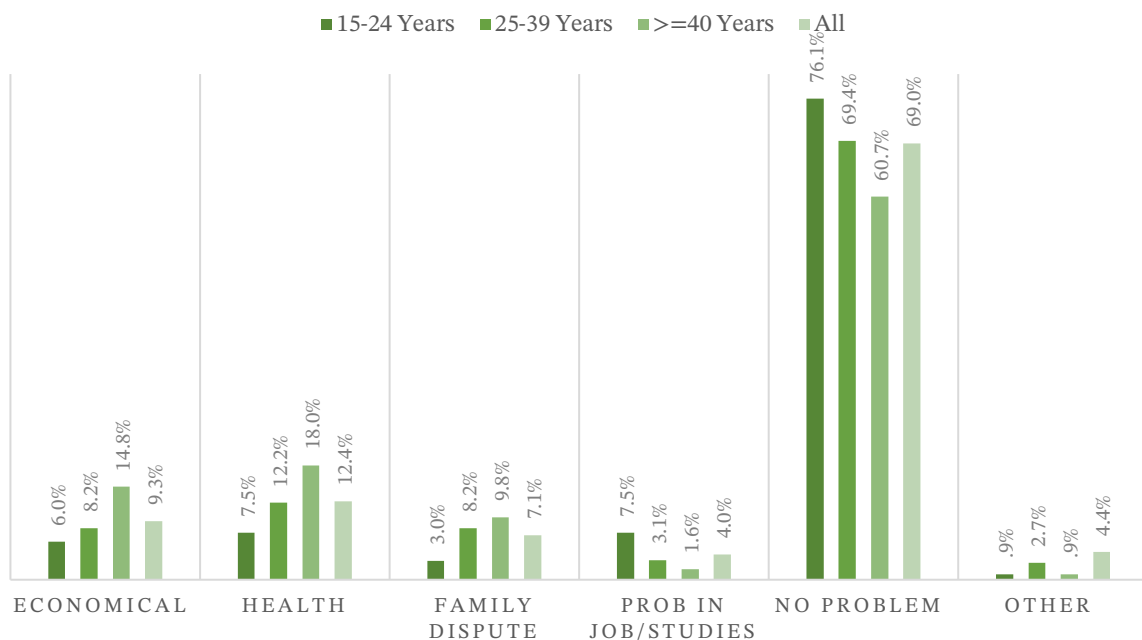
Figure 27: Problems faced by tobacco users

Economic issues, health issues and family dispute have been stated as significant issues faced by the tobacco users due to their tobacco use. The majority of the users have stated that they do not face any issues due to tobacco use. This might be an indication of the low level of knowledge regarding the harm of tobacco use among the majority of the users.

4. Discussion

ADIC has been conducting trend surveys on tobacco usage patterns in Sri Lanka, to identify the status of tobacco use within the country, and to use the data obtained through the surveys to advocate for effective implementation of tobacco control policies and to develop and implement target-group based community interventions aimed at tobacco prevention. The present tobacco trend survey provides a detailed overview of tobacco usage patterns in 2023 and the change in tobacco use compared to previous years.

The tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, killing over 8 million people a year around the world. More than 7 million of those deaths result from direct tobacco use while around 1.3 million occur due to non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke.[7] Furthermore, tobacco use is a known risk factor for the development of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), and NCDs have risen to become the primary cause of morbidity and mortality in Sri Lanka.[8] This situation poses a significant threat to the health and well-being of the country's citizens and places a substantial burden on the economy as well. As our country slowly recovers from the severe economic crisis of recent years, the additional strain on the health sector and communities due to tobacco use is unwarranted and therefore, requires careful attention and action.

When considering the districts included in the survey, Kurunegala district reported the highest usage. Kurunegala is a district in the North Western province of Sri Lanka, and it has a workforce who mostly engage in agricultural work. According to research conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), smokers are more likely to come from households in the lowest wealth quintile, which includes agricultural and fishery workers[9]. Therefore, it can be stipulated that the tobacco usage among these communities is comparatively high due to the nature of their manual labour, as well as the lack of knowledge about the harm caused by tobacco. Cigarettes and beedi are the most frequently used tobacco products in Sri Lanka, while cigars and other types of tobacco products are used in a lesser degree.

Regardless of the type of product, age of the survey participants or the occupation, daily tobacco use is the most prominent. This denotes that the users are showing an addictive nature to the products, while spending a large sum of money on these products daily. This has been proven from the answers obtained for the questions regarding monthly expenditure on tobacco products from the survey participants (an amount of Rs. 90 – Rs. 75,000 is spent monthly on tobacco products). According to the survey, the daily tobacco users mostly belong in the age group 40 years and above. From the different types of tobacco products, cigarettes are the most popular type among all age groups and most occupational sectors. Even at initiation of tobacco use, cigarette was reported to be the most prominently used product. And majority of the survey participants had initiated tobacco use between the ages 18-20 years, mostly at social gatherings such as big matches and parties. These results are mostly consistent with the previous findings. The subtle promotions carried out by the tobacco industry through various media and other platforms aimed at building up a positive image of their products is the key determinant that drive this behaviour. Therefore, policy formulations are extremely important within the country to stop or delay initiations as much as possible.

From the survey participants, 35.9% had been successful in quitting tobacco use at the time of administering the survey. The most prominent reasons for quitting tobacco use were given as the realization that it is a purposeless behaviour, health concerns, and financial issues, while price increases of tobacco products were

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[7] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco
[8] https://adicsrilanka.org/facts-on-tobacco/
[9] https://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2020/01/06/tobacco-smoking-in-sri-lanka-going-the-last-mile/

also mentioned by the survey participants. Tax and price increases is a proven measure to reduce tobacco harm, as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), which will result in reduced affordability of tobacco products for individuals, leading to reduced tobacco use in the long run. Article 6 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) specifically encourages price and tax measures as effective means to reduce the demand for tobacco.[10] Therefore, implementing tax and pricing policies on tobacco products is imperative to successfully address the issues associated with tobacco use in the country. Also, as the country is facing numerous economic challenges at present, introducing indexation to adjust tobacco tax to inflation rates can be considered as a highly effective strategy to improve the government revenue as a solution to these challenges. Moreover, the survey responses indicate that the majority of participants are unaware of the harms and associated issues related to tobacco use. Therefore, it is a timely need to further disseminate knowledge regarding the health, economic and social impact of tobacco use among more individuals, encouraging them to change their behaviour and improve their overall well-being.

The survey findings further challenge the already established tobacco control policies within Sri Lanka. The National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol Act No. 27 enacted in 2006 imposes legal boundaries on selling tobacco and it is prohibited to sell tobacco products for individuals under the age of 21 years. However, the survey reveals that a percentage of 19.5% between 15-21 years of age is current smokers, indicating the prevalence of tobacco sales to underaged individuals even amidst legal prohibitions established within the country. Therefore, it is imperative for educational and other relevant government authorities to take required action to mitigate this situation, to reduce initiations of tobacco use among the youth and children, while contributing to the positive trend of reduced tobacco use within the country.

The overall trend of tobacco use within the last decade depicts a decline in the usage of tobacco products among the country's citizens. The tobacco control measures, and the community interventions established by interested parties to strengthen and empower target communities have been largely effective in reducing tobacco use within the country. The findings of the survey demonstrate the latest situation of tobacco use in Sri Lanka. The information will provide guidance to all interested organizations and individuals to choose appropriate approaches to enforce evidence-based tobacco control policies and develop prevention interventions targeting user specific usage patterns in the country.

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[10] https://www.who.int/europe/activities/promoting-taxation-on-tobacco-products#:~:text=The%20World%20Health%20Organization%20recommends,53%20countries%20in%20the%20Region.

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