

2021

**TREND SURVEY ON
TOBACCO**

Annual Trend Survey on
Tobacco and Smoking in Sri Lanka

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Abbreviations

ADIC	Alcohol & Drug Information Centre
WHO	World Health Organization
WHO-FCTC	World Health Organization - Framework Convention on Tobacco Control
NATA	National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol
MPOWER	M-monitor, P-protect, O-offer, W-warn, E-enforce, R-raise
ATOD	Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
COVID-19	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)
CTC	Ceylon Tobacco Company
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
YAN	Youth Action Network
NCD	Non-Communicable Diseases

Executive Summary

ADIC conducts trend surveys annually for alcohol and tobacco since 1998. The trend survey analysis (also known as the SPOT Survey) is conducted with the intention of mapping and tracing current trends of alcohol and tobacco consumption in Sri Lanka. This report will present the findings of the trend survey for the year 2021 which was aimed at determining trends of tobacco consumption across the country, thereby assisting policymakers in formulating effective policies that aid reduction and prevention. Data was collected through a survey administered among the male population above 15 years of age, across 10 selected districts.

Data analysis and results were formulated based on the responses of a total of 2504 participants who fitted the inclusion criteria. From the selected respondents, 24% (n=597) were current consumers of tobacco, which is also shown in 2019 data. Even though the trend survey presents a reduction in tobacco consumption in the year 2020, 2021 shows a slight increment. This increment may not be considered for major conclusions since the years 2020 and 2021 had an impact on social behaviour due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 the current tobacco consumers are daily users. The highest consumption rates were reported from the age category 40 years, and above which was consistent with previous trend surveys.

Cigarettes are the most prominently consumed tobacco product among the majority of the current consumers, regardless of their age group and district. Beedi was consumed at a lower rate within all age groups, districts and occupational categories. When considering the district-wise comparison, Colombo reported the highest tobacco consumption while Kegalle reported the lowest. Initiation of tobacco use has occurred mostly during the age 18-20 years (35.7%). By the age of 20, 75.6% has initiated tobacco consumption and the most common type of tobacco product consumed at initiation was cigarette (86%). Majority of the users have initiated consuming tobacco products with friends and at parties. These findings too, are in agreement with previous trend surveys.

Only 20% of the respondents had been successful in quitting tobacco at the time of administering the survey, which indicates that more than three-quarter of the sample has not been able to quit. The reasons for quitting tobacco use were different among the three age groups. However, financial issues and health concerns were the two most common factors for quitting, while some had no special reason.

The need for effective policy formulation and prevention activities and the lack of a National Action Plan to effectively formulate policies are highlighted through this survey. The study also provides a platform for further discussions on the importance of delaying or preventing initiation and banning tobacco sales for underage persons.

1. Introduction

Despite the comprehensive monitoring systems that are in place across most countries around the world, tobacco smoking kills around 8 million people a year globally and more than seven million of those deaths are a result of direct tobacco use while the rest are non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke (1). Smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke are known to cause serious cardiovascular and respiratory diseases such as coronary heart disease and lung cancer. There are at least 20 different sub-types of cancer caused by tobacco (2). An estimated 2.4 million annual cancer deaths are caused by tobacco (3).

There are around 1.3 billion current smokers globally (3,4). Around 80% of these smokers are from middle or low-income countries. This number continues to rise with the population growth being centred upon the South-East Asian region. Tobacco smoking accounts for around 20,000 deaths in Sri Lanka annually. This amount is proportional to 10% of all deaths caused each year. More than 50% of the deaths were caused by cardiovascular diseases thereby making it the most common cause of death. This was predominantly seen among the younger population given the mean age of smoking initiation being as low as 20.6 years.

Upon realizing the global threat to public health from tobacco and the urgent need for action to save human lives, WHO developed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO-FCTC) in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic. The main provisions of the WHO-FCTC were to reduce both the demand and supply of tobacco products. Sri Lanka too had been working hard on addressing issues related to alcohol and tobacco and was one of the first countries to ratify the WHO-FCTC. The National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) was established in 2006 to enact strong legal aspects for prevention activities in Sri Lanka.

In many of its reports and publications, WHO has highlighted the importance of effective monitoring and evaluation strategies in formulating effective prevention policies. To help implement the WHO-FCTC, around the same time, WHO introduced a tool named MPOWER to assist this process. The tool consists of six main areas namely M-monitor, P-protect, O-offer, W-warn, E-enforce, and R-raise. Once the prevention policies are implemented, effective monitoring strategies could ideally protect people from tobacco smoke and in turn would be able to offer help to quit tobacco use, warn about dangers of tobacco use, enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship and raise taxes (5,6). Sri Lanka had been successful in several tobacco demand reduction activities such as 80% compulsory pictorial health warnings on cigarette packets. A price increase of 43% in 2016 largely contributed to the reduction of tobacco use island wide. Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC), Sri Lanka is responsible for mapping trends of alcohol and tobacco use across the country since 1998. ADIC conducts trend surveys annually to track all sorts of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD) consumption trends across the country. These surveys greatly help policymakers design more strong and targeted tobacco control policies on prevention (5).

Results from trend surveys conducted in 2017 and 2018 show a significant reduction in tobacco use. This proves the effectiveness of some of the policies that were implemented in the year 2016. There was a slight increase in tobacco smoking for the year 2018 compared to 2017. This indicates that the policies implemented in previous years had been insufficient to withstand the marketing strategies of the tobacco company.

1.1 Objectives

The objectives of the 2021 tobacco trend survey analysis are as follows.

- Determine different trends of smoking across the country in terms of different products, age groups and districts.
- Analyse and compare the trends of smoking from surveys conducted in previous years.
- Identify the underlying attitudes and reasons for smoking among different age groups, and districts.
- Determine the age of initiation of tobacco smoking.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study method

The trend survey for the year 2021 was conducted following the same methodology which has been continued for the past two decades, to keep the consistency of the results. However, this had been a challenge since the year 2020 due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the procedure for data collection for the trend survey was slightly deviated from the standard process according to the guidelines established by the health authorities in the country.

2.2 Study locations

The survey was conducted in 10 districts in Sri Lanka. The districts which were selected as study locations are Anuradhapura, Badulla, Matale, Colombo, Gampaha, Jaffna, Kegalle, Kurunegala, Batticaloa and Hambanthota.

2.3 Sampling

2.3.1 Sample design

Same as in the previous years, multi-stage sample design was used in the study.

2.3.2 Inclusion criteria

Male population above 15 years of age who were residing in Sri Lanka at the time of the survey were included as respondents for the study.

2.3.3 Exclusion criteria

Females were not included in the study as consumption rate of tobacco products among females is relatively less compared to males in Sri Lanka. Males who were under 15 years and any Individuals who were not residing in the selected districts at the time of the study, were excluded from the survey.

2.3.4 Sample size

From each district, 250 participants were included in the survey. Therefore, the total sample size was 2500 in all 10 districts.

2.3.5 Sampling method

Firstly, through a randomized batch selection process, one district was selected from each of the nine administrative provinces in Sri Lanka, to obtain a representative sample of the whole country. This procedure was repeated three times to select three batches of districts out of which two were included in the previous surveys in the years 2019 and 2020. The third batch was used in the current survey for the year 2021. Colombo and Jaffna districts were automatically included as important districts. With this inclusion, 10 districts were included in total, in the survey.

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 study.

Table 01: Planned allocation of survey participants

Age group	Sample allocation	Per district	Per age group
15 – 24 Years	40%	100	1000
24 – 39 Years	40%	100	1000
40 Years and above	20%	50	500
Total	100%	250	2500

2.4 Data collection

Data collection was carried out using an interviewer-administered questionnaire, which contained 36 questions in total (Annex 1). The first five questions were created for gathering demographic information of the study participants. Few questions were reserved for the contemporary issues directly affecting alcohol and tobacco use. The rest of them were composite questions which were developed to obtain information regarding both alcohol and tobacco consumption. The questionnaire was initially prepared in Sinhala and later translated into Tamil. Both Sinhala and Tamil questionnaires were administered in the field according to the language preference of the respondents.

Undergraduates of University of Ruhuna and University of Jaffna, and representatives from Youth Action Network (YAN) were selected and trained by ADIC as data collectors, for the purpose of collecting data for the study. The survey was conducted within the period of October to November 2021.

2.5 Data analysis

Data collected by the survey was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Key analysis of this report is based on the response of **“Current Smokers.”** Smoking trends 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 smoked within the past 30 days (irrelevant of number of time or sticks smoked) while ‘Last 30-Day Abstainers’ were individuals who had smoked all long, however, have abstained during the past 30 days at the time of the survey. Individuals who have never smoked in their lifetime were referred to as ‘Lifetime Abstainers’.

3. Results

3.1 Survey responses based on district

A total of 2504 valid responses were received from males above 15 years with an overall response rate of 99.8%. However, the response rate for each question may vary from the overall sample. A summary of the status of responses from all 10 districts is stated below.

Table 02: Survey responses based on district

District	Province	Age Group			Total
		15-24	25-39	>=40	
Anuradhapura	North-central	95 38.00%	100 40.00%	55 22.00%	250 100.00%
Badulla	Uva	94 37.60%	96 38.40%	60 24.00%	250 100.00%
Matale	Central	88 35.60%	100 40.50%	59 23.90%	247 100.00%
Colombo	Western	91 36.40%	99 39.60%	60 24.00%	250 100.00%
Gampaha	Western	90 36.00%	96 38.40%	64 25.60%	250 100.00%
Jaffna	Northern	91 36.40%	111 44.40%	48 19.20%	250 100.00%
Kegalle	Sabaragamuwa	94 37.30%	101 40.10%	57 22.60%	252 100.00%
Kurunegala	North-western	92 36.80%	103 41.20%	55 22.00%	250 100.00%
Batticaloa	Eastern	92 35.90%	109 42.60%	55 21.50%	256 100.00%
Hambantota	Southern	95 38.20%	97 39.00%	57 22.90%	249 100.00%
Total		922 36.8%	1012 40.4%	570 22.8%	2504 100.00%

3.2 Demographic information of the study participants

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

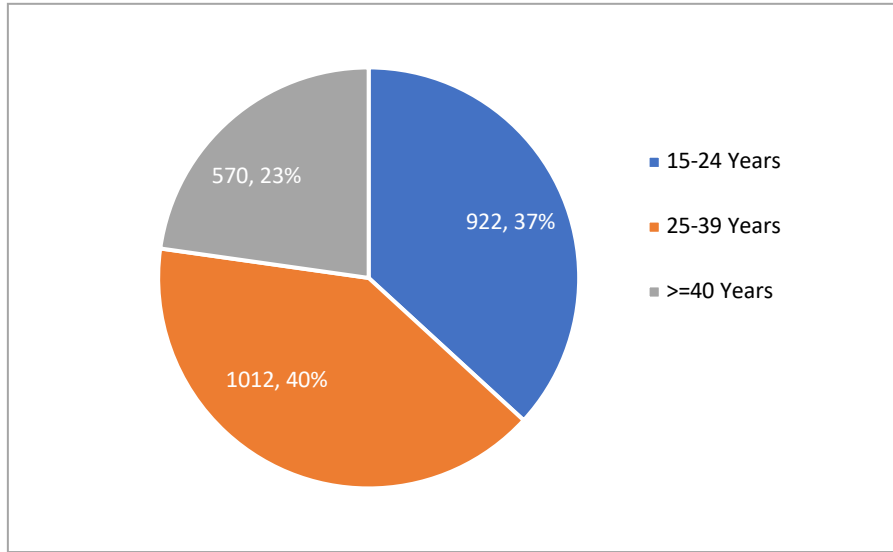


Figure 01: Survey responses based on age
Only males above 15 years of age

From the study participants, 40% belonged to the age group 25-39 years, which is the same as the allocated figure. The other two groups showed a slight difference in the actual figure when compared to the allocated sample percentage. (37% were in the age group 15-24 years and 23% were in the age group 40 years and above).

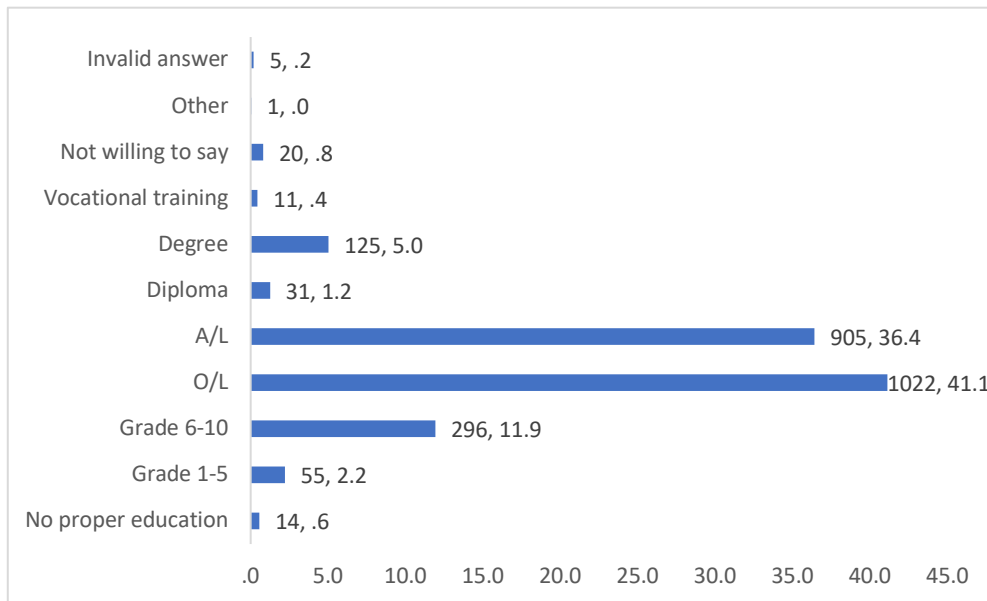


Figure 02: Education level of respondents
Only males above 15 years of age

The respondents belonged to various education levels. The highest percentage of respondents (41.1%) stated that they have completed G.C.E. Ordinary Level (O/L) while 36.4.% of the respondents have completed G.C.E. Advance Level (A/L). Apart from that, 11.9% have only continued their education only up to grade 6-10. The sample also consisted of Degree (5%) and Diploma (1.2%) holders.

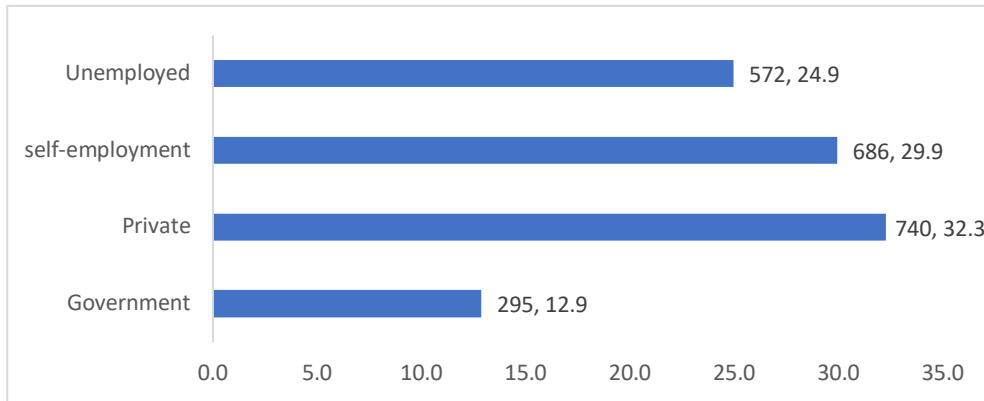


Figure 03: Occupation sector of respondents
Only males above 15 years of age

The highest percentage of the survey respondents were from the cooperate sector (32.3%) while the lowest percentage (12.9%) was from the government sector. The second highest percentage of respondents (29.9%) were self-employed. From the participants, 24.9% were unemployed, since a considerable number of students also participated in the survey.

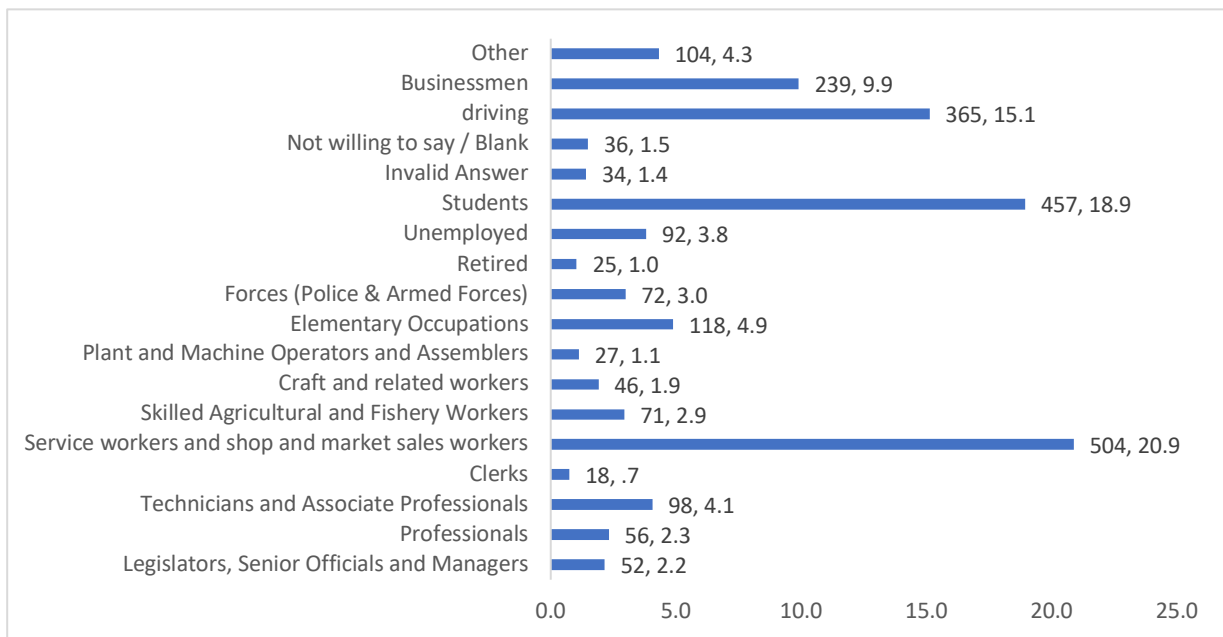


Figure 04: Occupation of respondents
Only males above 15 years of age

The above figure shows in detail, the distribution of study participants based on their occupation. The majority of respondents (20.9%) were service workers and shop/ market sales workers, while the lowest percentage (0.7%) were clerks. There was a considerably high percentage of students as well (18.9%), while 15.1% of the respondents were drivers.

3.3 Results obtained from the survey

3.3.1 Status of tobacco smoking among males

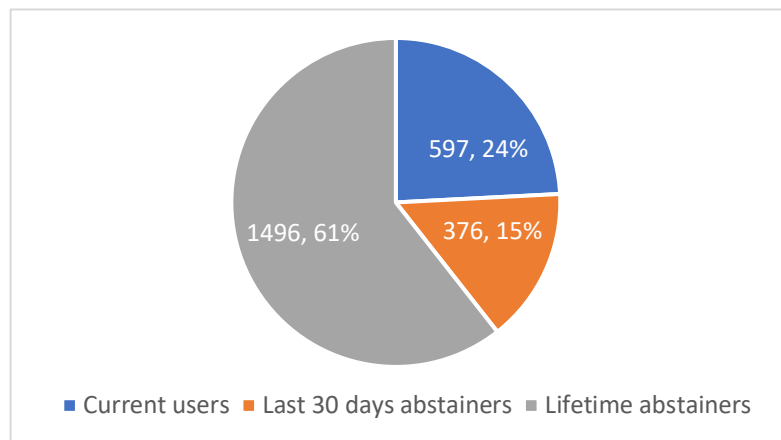


Figure 05: Tobacco consumption
Only males above 15 years of age

According to the survey findings nearly two-third of the sample was lifetime abstainers (61%). Only 24% of the respondents were current users while 15% had not consumed tobacco during the last 30 days at the time of the survey.

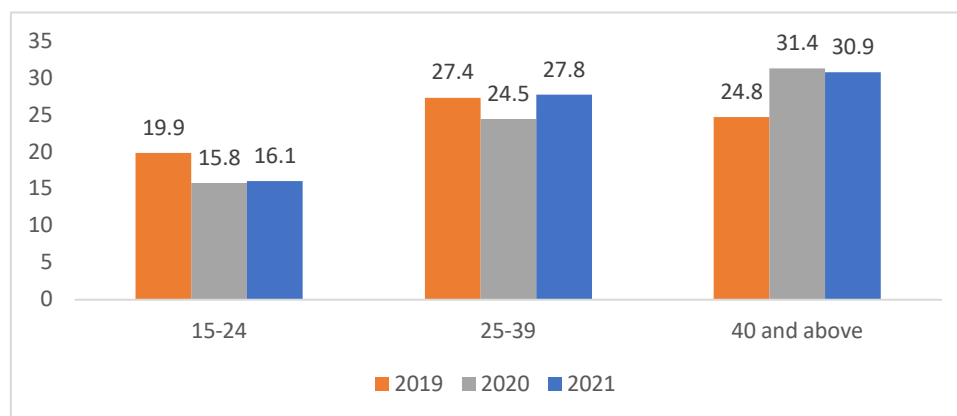


Figure 06: Comparison of tobacco consumption among 3 consecutive years
Only males above 15 years of age

The above figure shows a comparison of the consumption of tobacco in the years 2019, 2020 and 2021. In the age group 15-24 years there's a reduction in tobacco use in years 2020 and 2021, compared to 2019. Within the age group 25-39 years, there is no significant change in tobacco use within the last three years. Tobacco use has increased in the age group 40 and above, during the years.

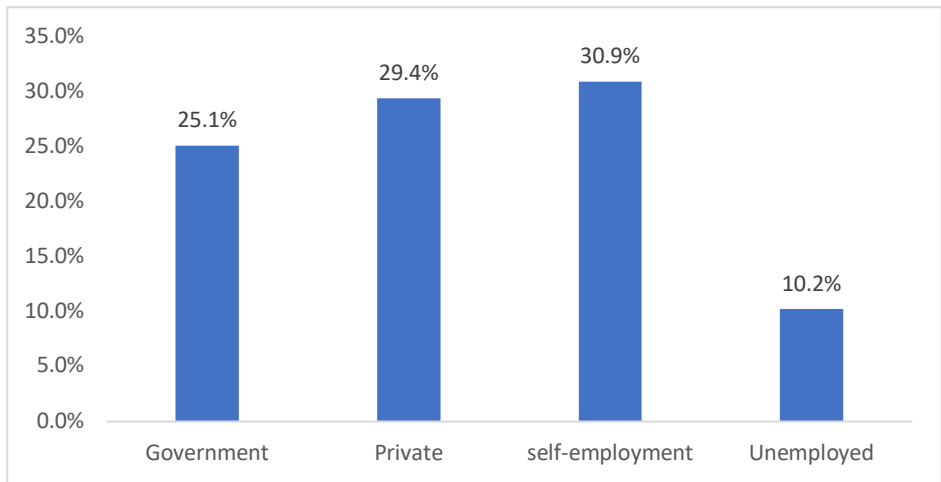


Figure 07: Tobacco consumption by occupation sector
Only males above 15 years of age

The participants who were self-employed represented the highest percentage in tobacco consumption (30.9%) while the unemployed group reported the lowest rate (10.2%). The participants from the cooperate sector also represented a considerably large percentage in tobacco consumption (29.4%).

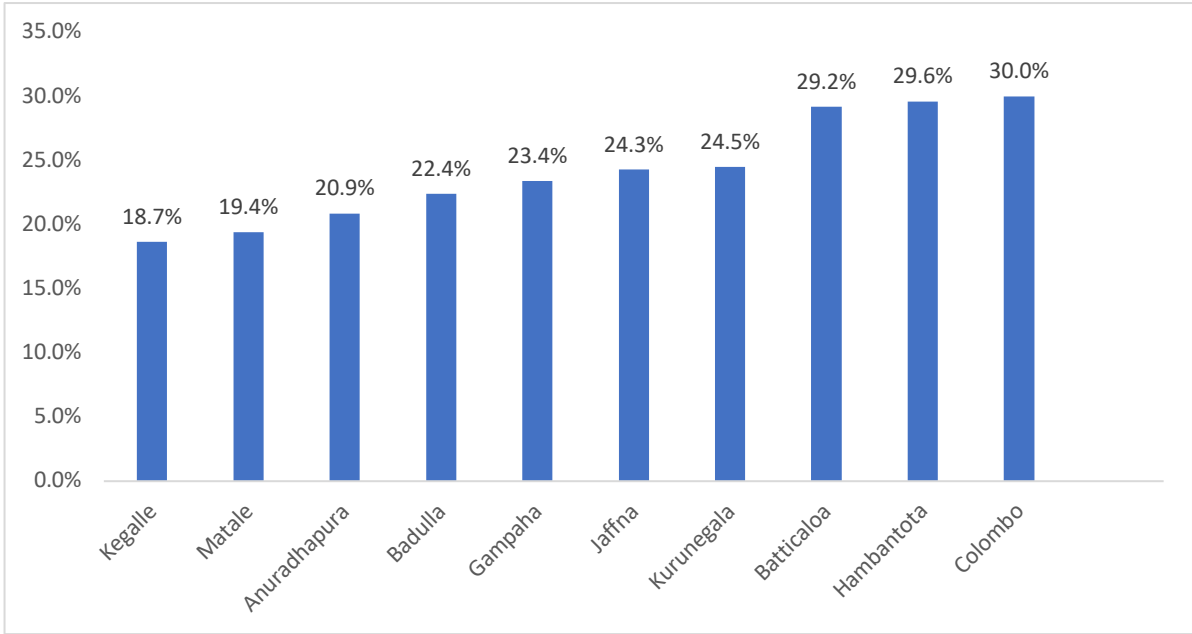


Figure 08: Status of tobacco consumption by district
Only males above 15 years of age

When considering the districts included in the survey, the highest percentage of tobacco users were reported from Colombo district (30%) while the second highest percentage was observed in Hambantota district (29.6%). The lowest number of tobacco users was observed in Kegalle district (18.7%).

3.3.2 Smoking frequency among males

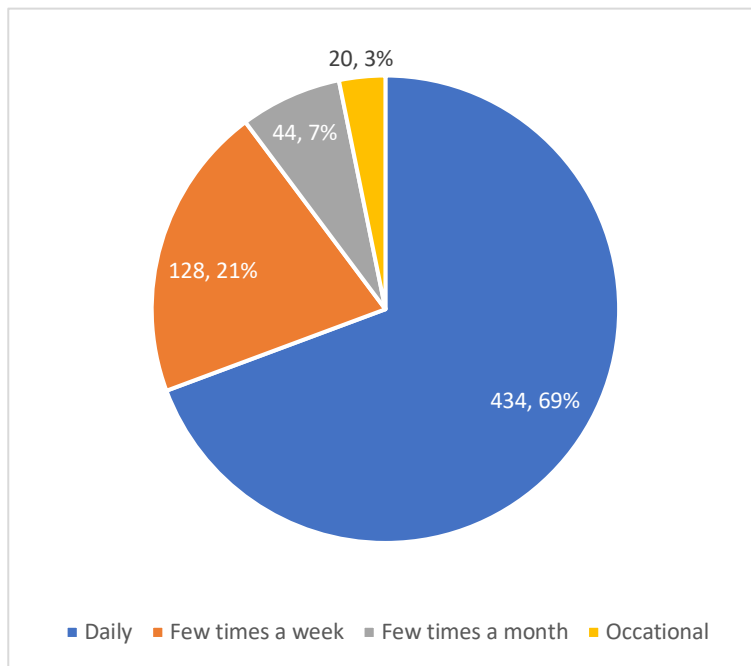


Figure 09: Frequency of tobacco consumption among current smokers
Only males above 15 years of age

It was observed that the majority (69%) of the respondents were daily users while the lowest percentage of respondents only used tobacco products occasionally (3%). From the participants, 21% used tobacco products a few times a week, while 7% of them consumed tobacco products a few times a month.

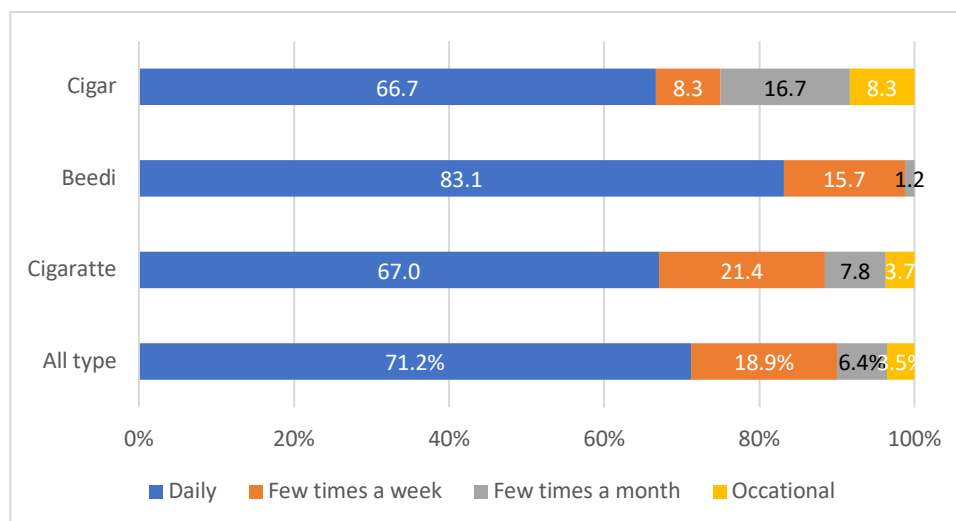


Figure 10: Frequency of tobacco consumption by type of product
Only males above 15 years of age

The highest percentage of daily users consumed beedi (83.1%), while the lowest percentage of daily users (66.7%) have reported that they use cigars. And daily consumption can be observed as the most prominent method of consuming tobacco, regardless of the type of product, among the users.

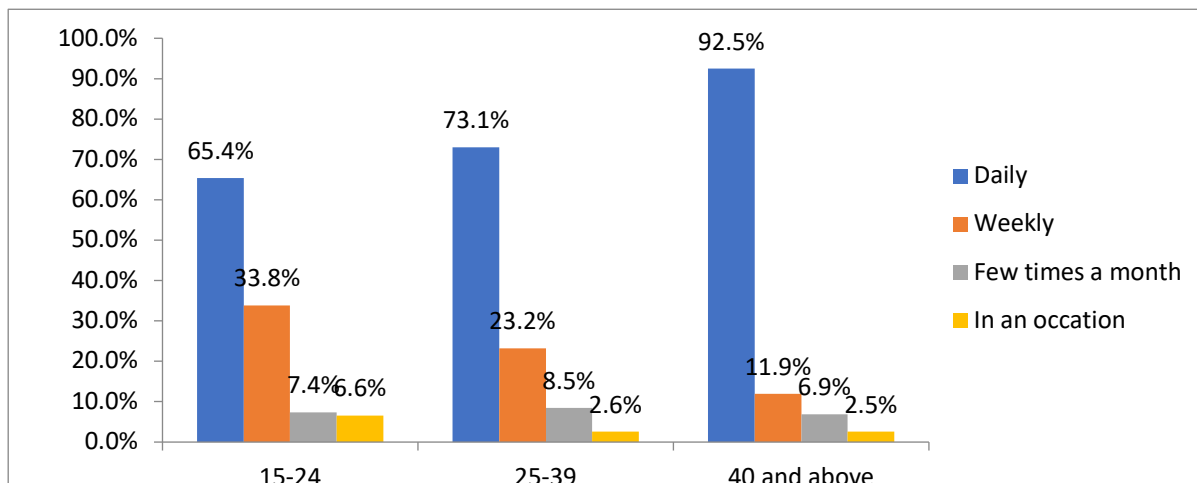


Figure 11: Frequency of tobacco consumption by age group
Only males above 15 years of age

The highest percentage of daily users (92.5%) of tobacco products falls under the age group 40 years and above. The lowest percentage of tobacco users (65.4%) are in the age group 15-24 years. A considerably high percentage (73.1%) of daily users is present in the age group 25-39 years. Again, daily use of tobacco products is the most common form of consumption among the respondents.

3.3.3 Types of tobacco products

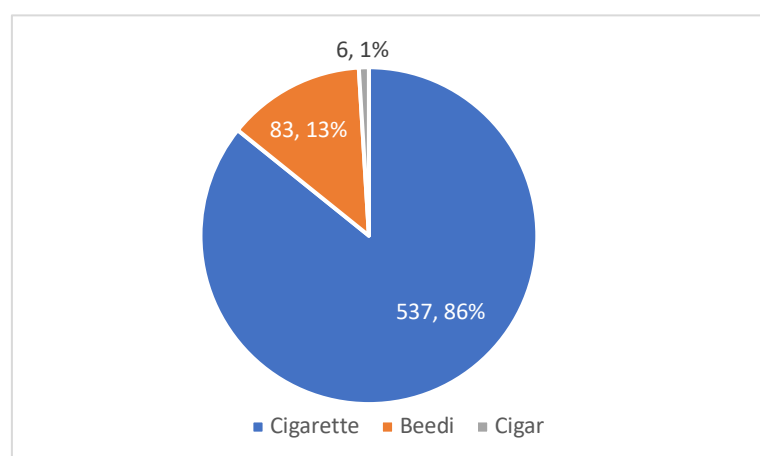


Figure 12: Available types of tobacco products
Only males above 15 years of age

Various forms of tobacco products are available for the users in Sri Lanka. However, this survey focuses only on the tobacco products which are used for smoking since it is the most common method of tobacco consumption in our country.

The most prominently used tobacco product among the smokers is cigarettes (86%), while the second most used tobacco product is beedi (13%). Only 1% of the respondents have stated that they use cigars.

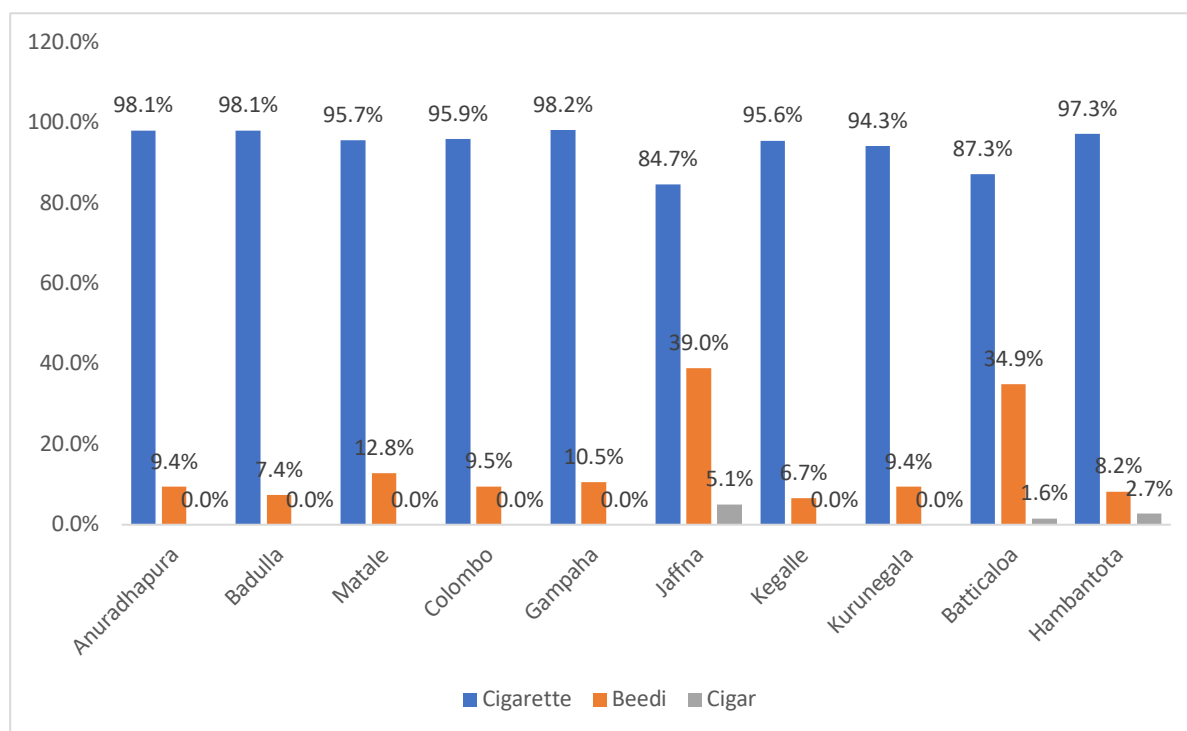


Figure 13: Types of tobacco products used in selected districts
Only males above 15 years of age

In all districts where the survey was conducted, cigarettes are the most common type of tobacco product used among smokers. The highest percentage of cigarette smokers was reported from Gampaha district (98.2%). Only very low percentages of smokers from Jaffna (5.1%), Batticaloa (1.6%) and Hambantota (2.7%) districts reported that they use cigars.

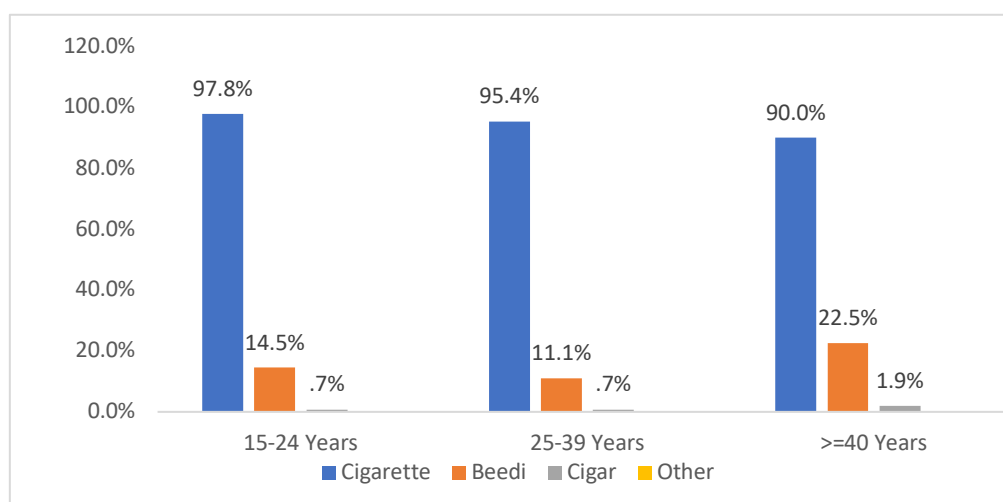


Figure 14: Types of tobacco products consumed by different age groups
Only males above 15 years of age

Multiple responses were obtained for this question from the respondents. Cigarette was observed to be the most popular type of tobacco product among all three age groups as all age groups have

reported more than 90% of cigarette use. The highest percentage (95.4%) of cigarette users are in the age group 25-39 years. The second most popular product is beedi, where the highest percentage of users (22.5%) was reported in the age group 40 years and above. Cigar use among the three age groups is very low compared to the other two products.

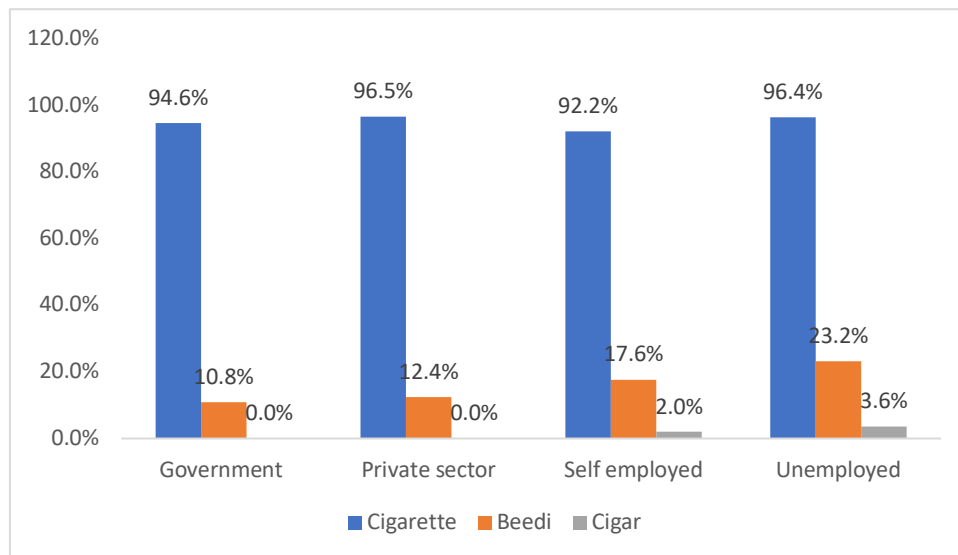


Figure 15: Type of tobacco products consumed based on the occupational sector
Only males above 15 years of age

This question too obtained multiple responses from the participants. Cigarette was again reported to be the most used tobacco product among participants in all occupational sectors. Among the four groups, the highest cigarette use was observed in the private sector (96.5%). Unemployed respondents reported the highest percentage of beedi consumption (23.2%), while government sectors reported the lowest percentage (10.8%).

3.3.4 Initiation of tobacco use

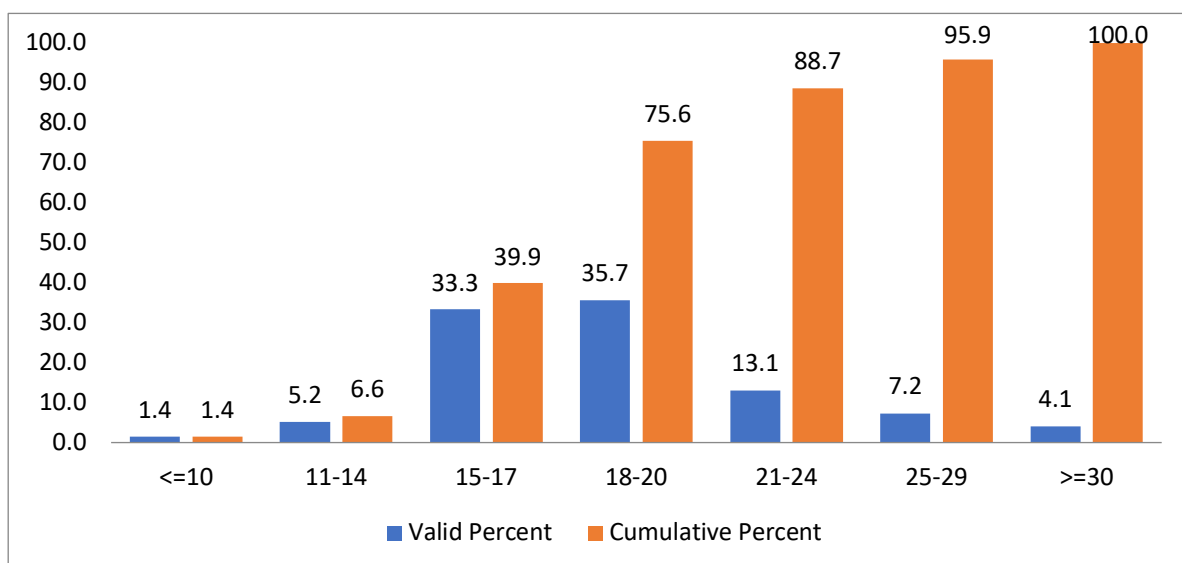


Figure 16: Tobacco initiation age
Only males above 15 years of age

Every user was expected to report their age at which they first used tobacco products. According to the above graph, the highest percentage of initiations (35.7%) was reported at the age 18-20 years. It further shows that majority of the smokers has initiated their tobacco consumption (75.7%) by the age of 20.

Table 03: Initiation age by age group

Age group	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Std. Error of Mean		F value
15-24	245	17.40	17	2.185	.156	.014	2.064
25-39	441	19.09	18	3.889	.116	.561	.001
40 and above	284	20.62	19	6.574	.145	1.935	

Table 03 illustrates the statistical data regarding the initiation age of tobacco products. According to this analysis, the median age for initiation of using tobacco products is 17-19 in all age groups, which agrees with the data obtained from the graphical representation in figure 15.

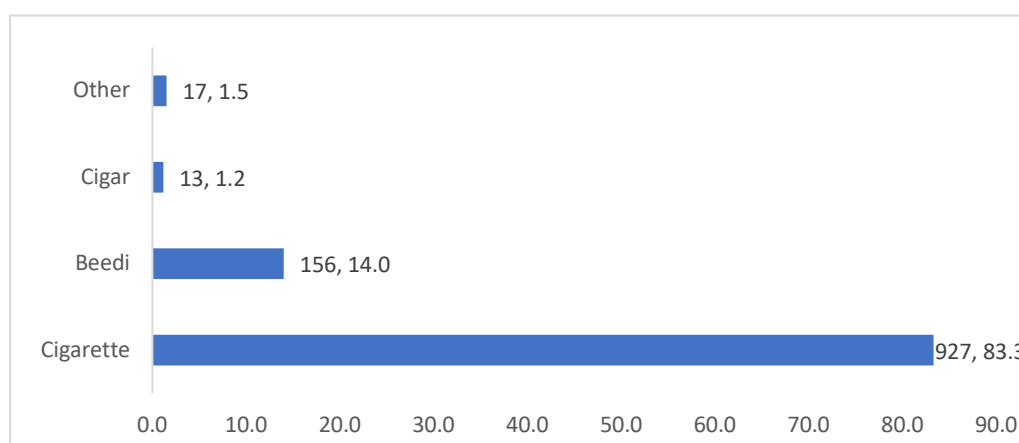


Figure 17: Type of tobacco product consumed at initiation
Only males above 15 years of age

At the time of initiation, the highest percentage of users (83.3%) have used cigarettes, while the lowest percentage of users (1.2%) have used cigars. From the users, 14% have consumed beedi at the time of initiation, making it the second highest consumed tobacco product at initiation among the users.

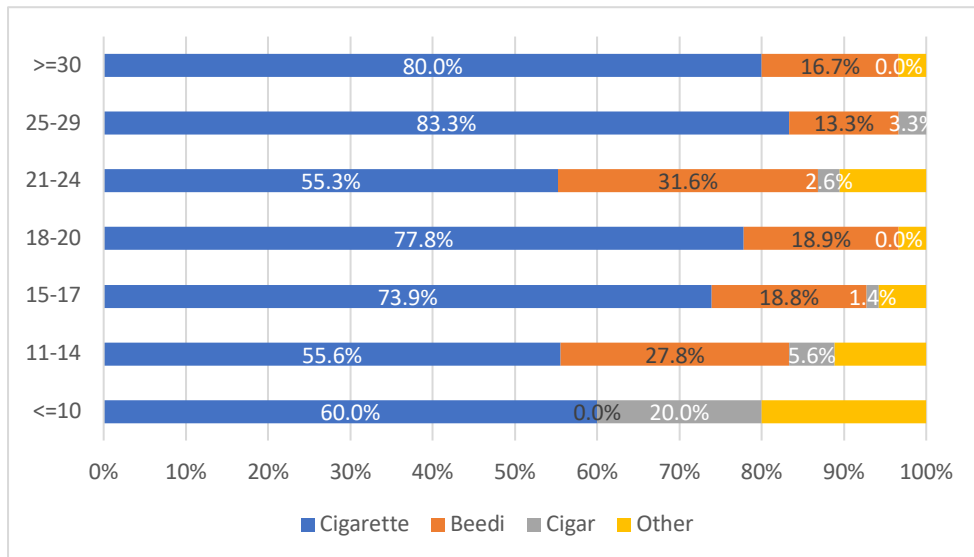


Figure 18: Type of tobacco product consumed at initiation by age group
Only males above 15 years of age

Cigarette is the most popular type of tobacco product consumed among all age groups at the time of initiation. Beedi too can be seen as popular after cigarettes and only a very small percentage has consumed cigars as the first product they have used. Apart from cigarette, beedi and cigar, a certain percentage has also used other types of tobacco products which hasn't been specified by the respondents in the study.

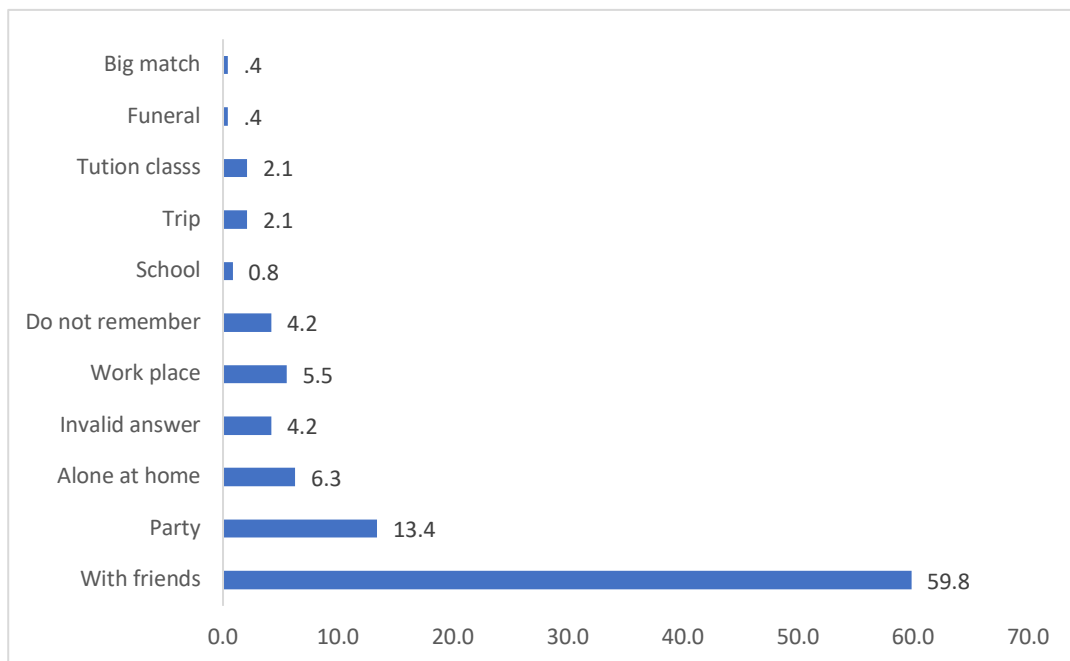


Figure 19: Tobacco initiation occasion
Only males above 15 years of age

According to the responses from the study participants, 59.8% have initiated tobacco use with friends while 13.4% have initiated at parties. Therefore, majority of the users have initiated using tobacco products at social gatherings.

3.3.5 Cessation of tobacco use

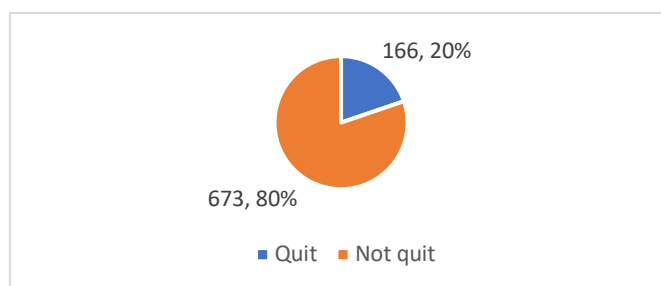


Figure 20: Quitting tobacco consumption
Only males above 15 years of age

This question was directed at lifetime smokers (n=987) and there was an 85% (839) response rate. From the respondents, the majority (80%) was unable to quit the habit, while only 20% of the lifetime smokers have quit smoking at the time of the survey. According to the obtained data, 46.7% (392) have reduced their consumption while 6.9% (58) responded that their consumption has increased. However, there were 26.6% (223) who stated there is no change in their consumption.

Table 4: Quitting age of tobacco smoking

	No. of respondents	Mean quit age	Std. Deviation	Min-Max
overall	188	30.65	13.184	10-75
15-24	32	18.81	1.975	14-23
25-39	79	25.16	5.060	12-38
40 or above	77	41.19	14.032	10-75

Table 4 presents the statistical data of the quitting age of tobacco consumption. The mean age for tobacco cessation was identified as 30 years.

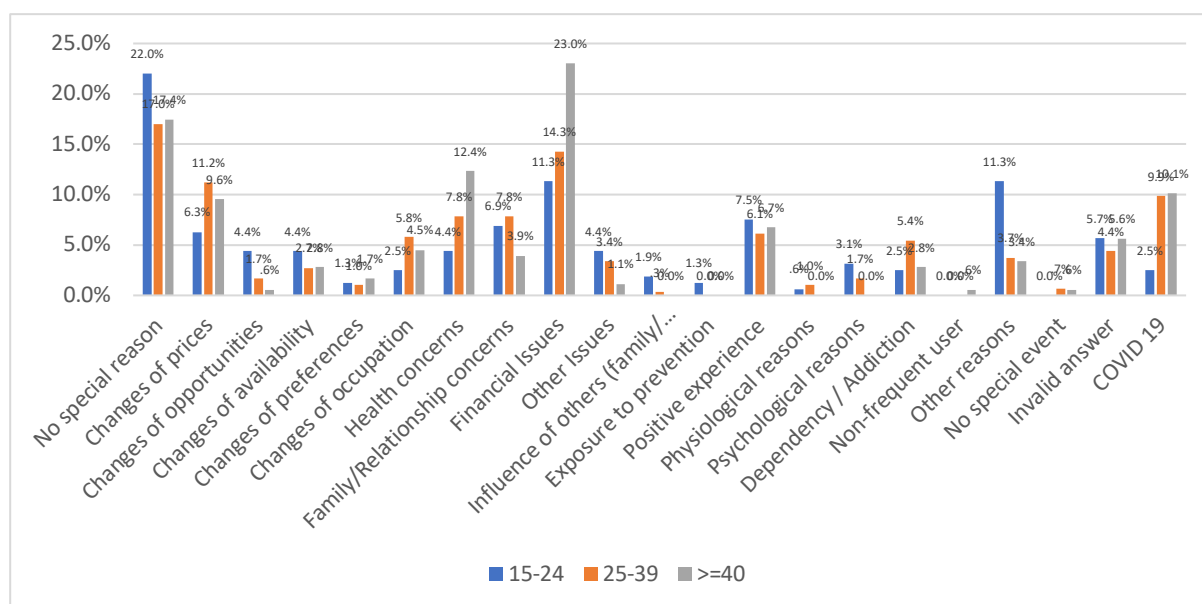


Figure 21: Reasons for reducing consumption of tobacco in each age group
Only males above 15 years of age

During the survey, the users in all three age groups were asked about the reasons which caused them to change their smoking pattern in the six months prior to the survey. Financial issues were mentioned by majority of the respondents in the age group 40 years and above while no special reason was stated by the respondents in the other two age groups. COVID-19 was also observed as an important reason for reducing tobacco use.

3.3.6 Expenditure on tobacco

Table 5: Monthly expenditure on tobacco for different age groups

	No: of respondents	Median (in rupees)	Interquartile Range (in rupees)	Min -Max (in rupees)
Age group (all current smokers)				
15-24	122	3000.00	4000	150-30000
25-39	256	4000.00	5800	80-50000
40 and above	154	5000.00	5325	100-67000
Age group (daily cigarette smokers)				
15-24	62	5524.84	3625	300-30000
25-39	168	8434.05	5938	100-50000
40 and above	103	8616.12	6000	1000-67000
Smoking Frequency (cigarette smokers)				
Daily	333	5850.000	5790.0	300-67000
Weekly	111	1950.000	2700.0	150-30000
Few times a month	33	800.000	1562.5	80-5000
Only at functions	17	500.000	1375.0	200-5000
Overall (Weighted)	522	4000.000	5000.0	80-67000

Note: Further analysis on age group and frequencies was done only for cigarette smokers

Table 5 provides detailed information on the monthly expenditure for all current smokers and daily cigarette smokers among the three age groups and expenditure based on smoking frequency.

Median value for the monthly expenditure is highest in the age group 40 years and above (Rs.5,000.00), while it is lowest in the age group 25-39 (Rs.3,000). However, monthly expenditure on tobacco products varies from Rs. 80.00 to Rs. 67,000.00 among all age groups. Cigarette was the most used tobacco product among all consumers and daily consumption was reported by most of them. According to the collected data all age groups spend a considerable amount of money on tobacco products. The youth spend a lesser amount on these products compared to the adult group.

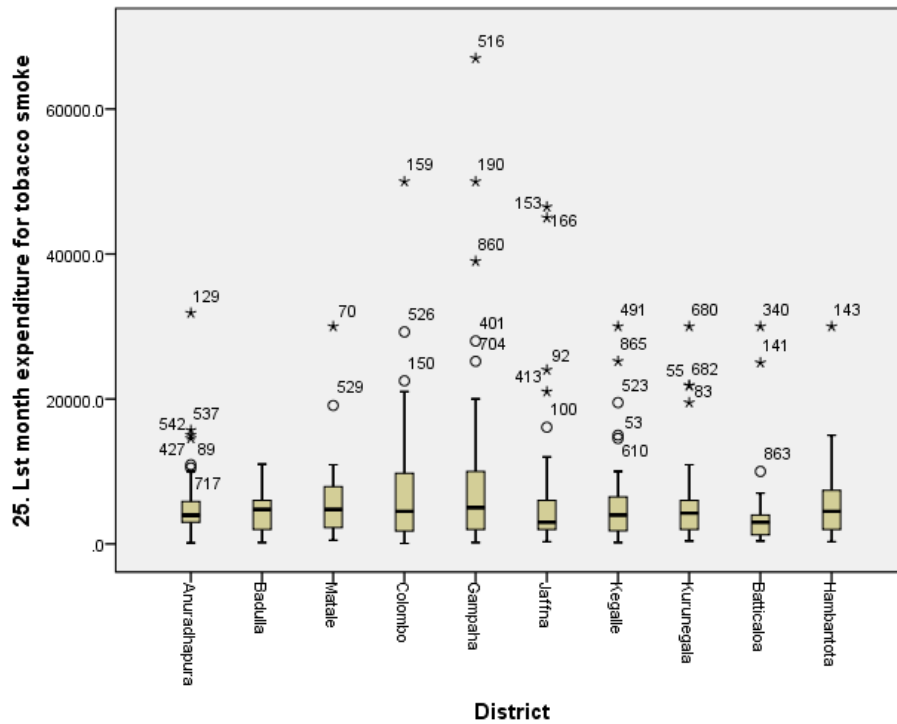


Figure 22: Monthly expenditure on tobacco for all users
Only males above 15 years of age

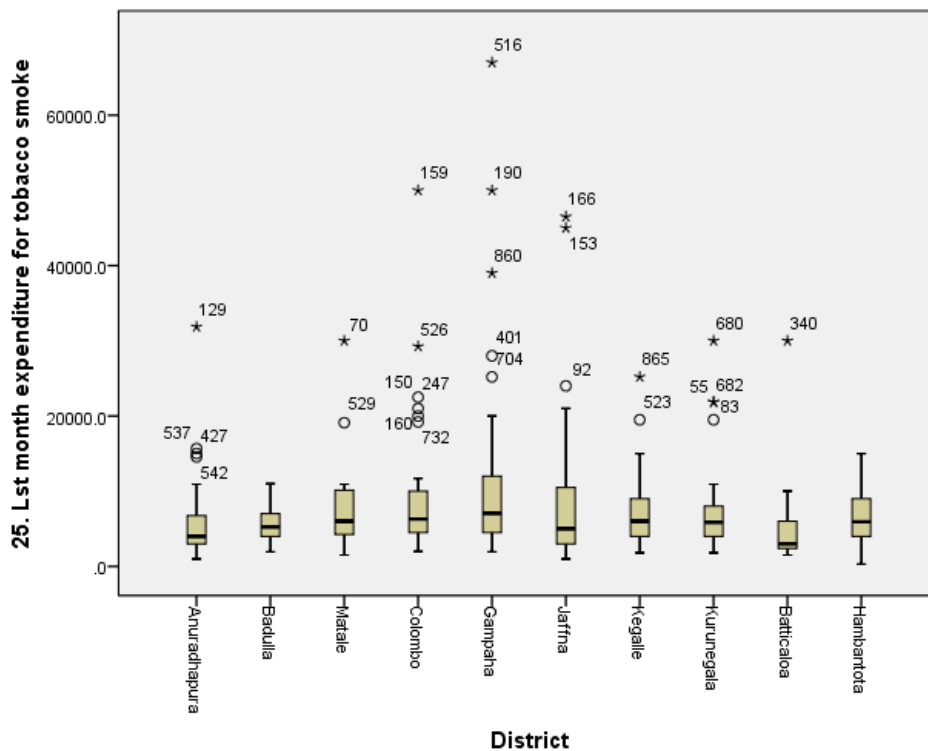


Figure 23: Monthly expenditure on cigarettes for daily users
Only males above 15 years of age

Expenditure on tobacco smoking in the last month prior to the survey for all current smokers and daily smokers in each district is shown in Figures 21 and 22 respectively. Among the daily smokers, the lowest expenditure

was observed from Kegalle district while the highest was reported from Colombo. Daily smokers tend to spend much higher amounts compared to the other groups.

3.3.7 Miscellaneous results

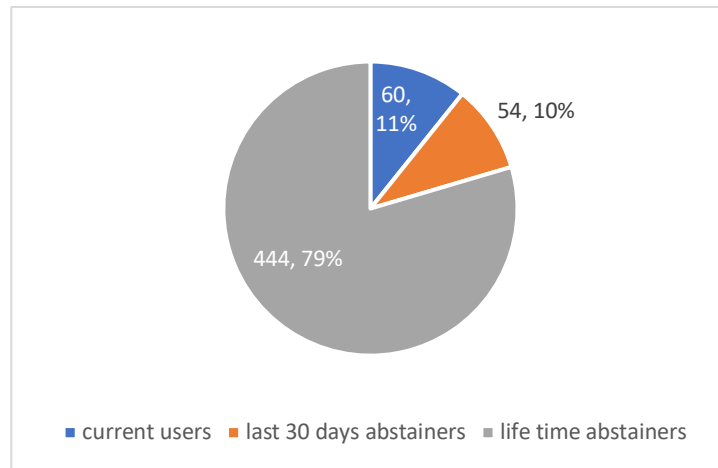


Figure 24: Status of smoking below 21 years
Only males above 15 years of age

In Sri Lanka, the legal age for consuming tobacco products is 21 years. However, through the results obtained from the survey, it was identified that there is still a percentage of 11% (n=60) under the age of 21 years who are current smokers, even though the majority (79%) of this age group are lifetime abstainers.

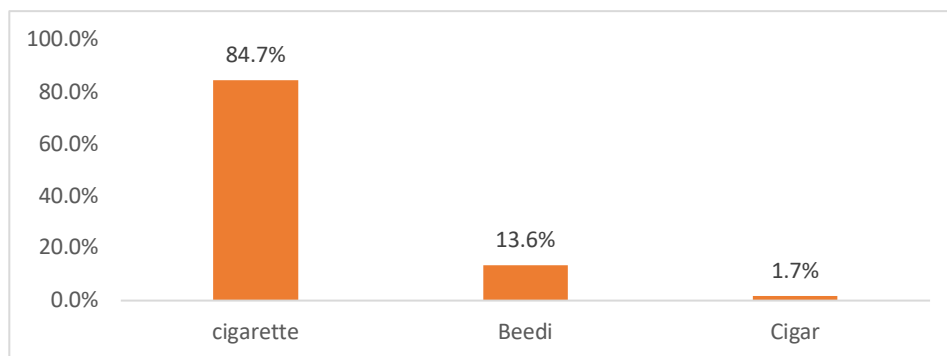


Figure 25: Types of tobacco products used by current smokers below the age of 21
Only males above 15 years of age

Same as in the other categories, the most popular tobacco product among the smokers who are below 21 years, is cigarettes. A very high percentage of this population (84.7%) use cigarettes while 13.6% use beedi. A small percentage (1.7%) uses cigars as well.

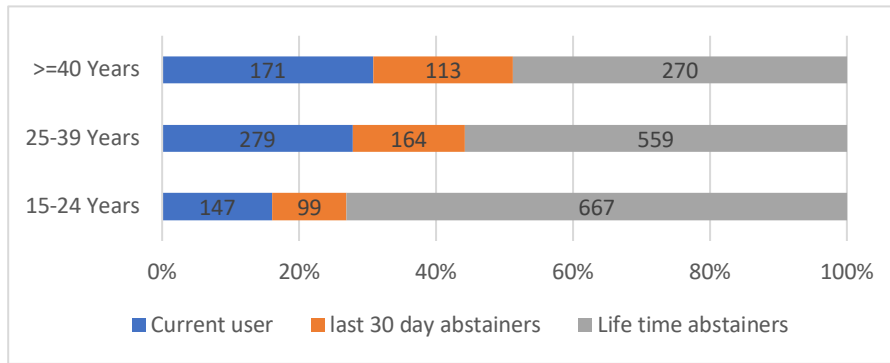


Figure 26: Usage of tobacco products in the three age groups
Only males above 15 years of age

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. In the age group 40 years and above, lifetime abstainers were lowest, compared to the other two groups.

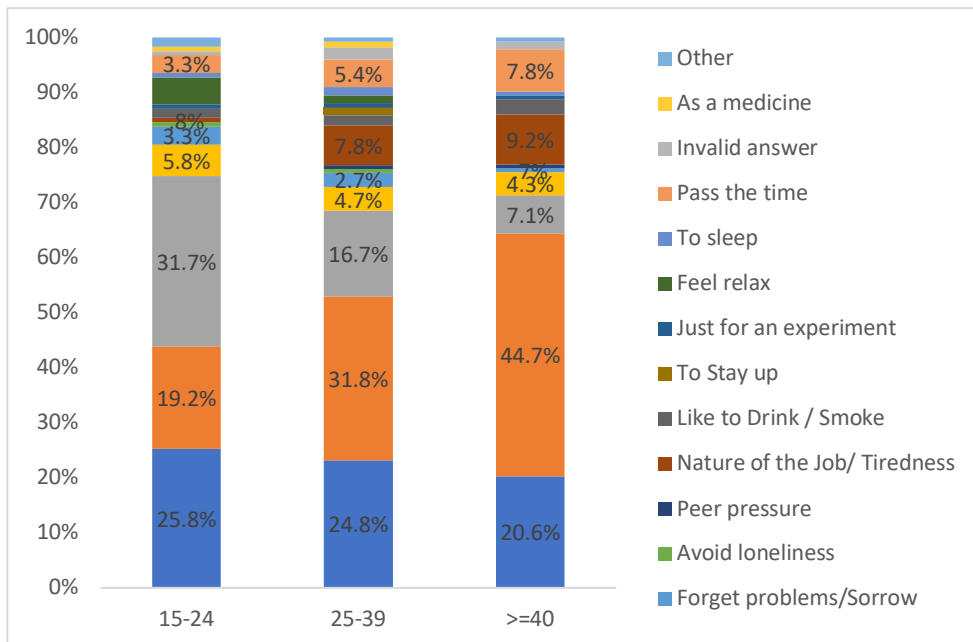


Figure 27: Reasons for smoking by current smokers among the three age groups
Only males above 15 years of age

From the respondents in the age group 15-24 years, 25.8% has stated that they use cigarettes just as an experiment, while 44.7% from the age group 40 years and above has mentioned that they smoke just to pass time. From the above graph it is clear that the smokers have come up with a large number of reasons for smoking which are quite different and controversial (e.g.: some have mentioned that they smoke to stay up late while some have stated that smoking helps them to sleep).

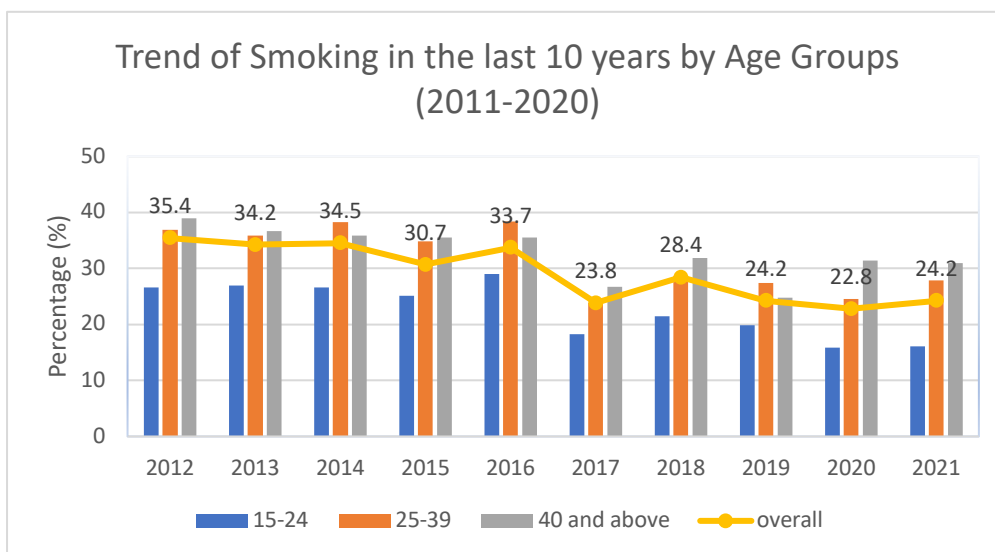


Figure 28: Tobacco smoking trend within the last 10 years
Only males above 15 years of age

The above graph shows that there is an overall decrease in tobacco consumption over the past decade. The average consumption is equal in the two years 2019 and 2021. The decline in 2020 might have been due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the travel restrictions established within the country for controlling the spread of the virus.

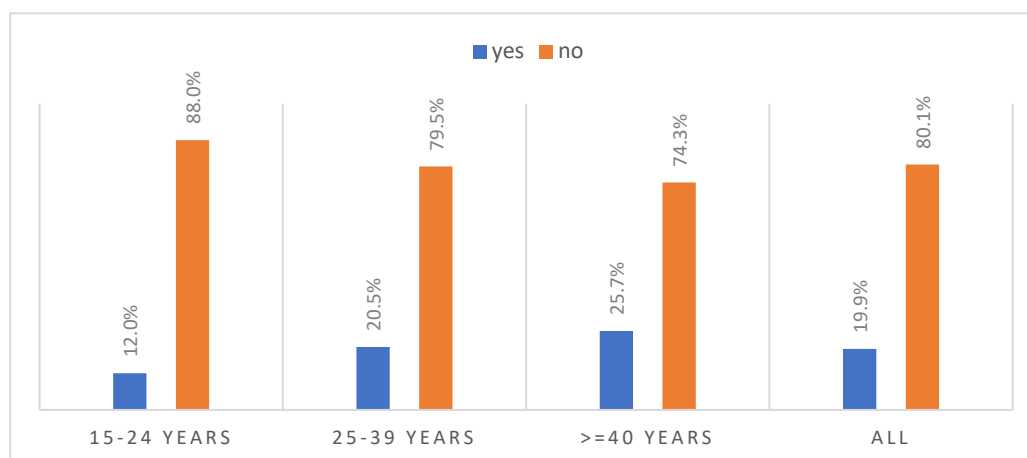


Figure 29: Tobacco smoking next to others
Only males above 15 years of age

This survey has inquired from the current smokers whether they have engaged in smoking in the presence of others, in order to understand the harmfulness caused due to passive smoking. According to the obtained data, in all three age groups only a low percentage smoke in the presence of others.

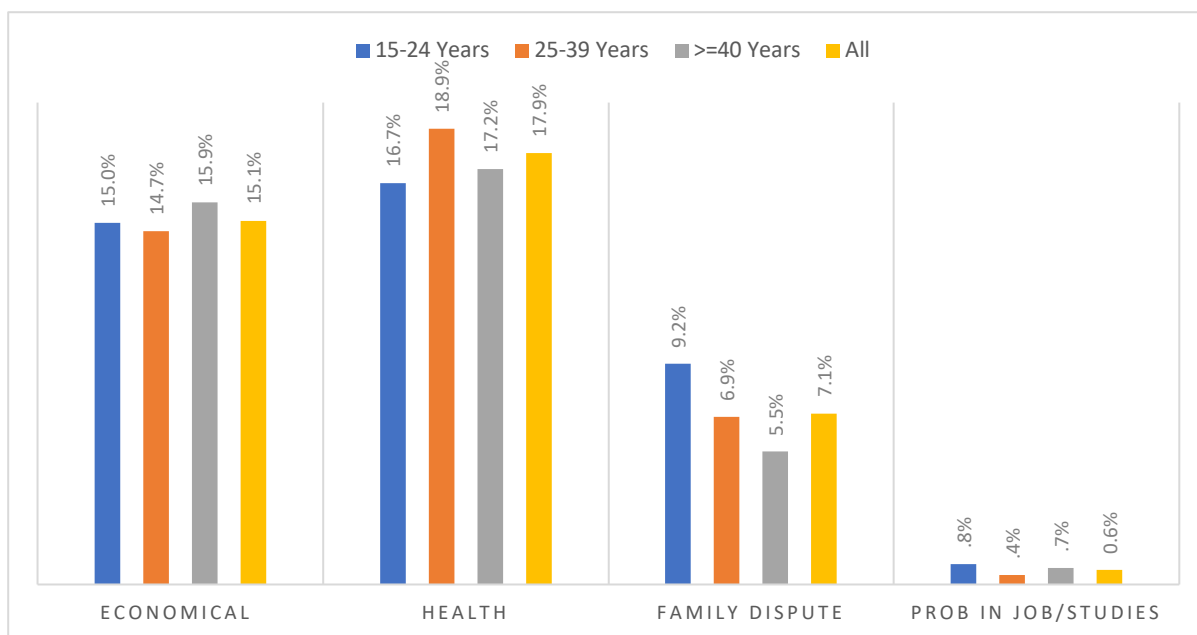


Figure 30: Problems faced by tobacco smokers
Only males above 15 years of age

All three age groups have reported health problems as the main issue related to tobacco use while the second highest problem was stated as economical issues. Family issues were also mentioned by a considerable percentage of respondents while problems related to work or studies have been reported by only a small percentage.

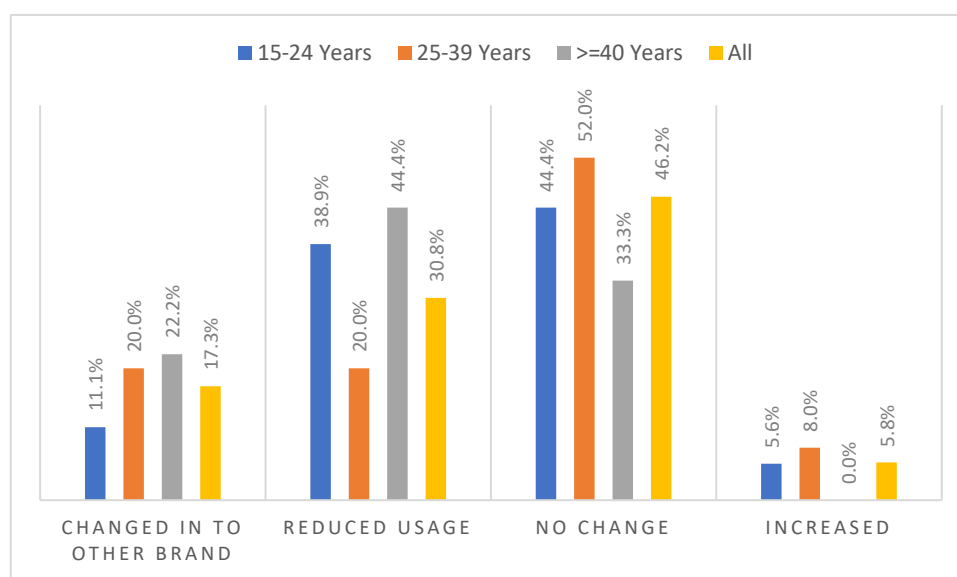


Figure 31: Effect of COVID-19 outbreak on tobacco use
Only males above 15 years of age

Figure 30 is a representation of how COVID-19 pandemic has affected tobacco consumption among the users. When considering responses from all the study participants, a considerable percentage (30.8%) has stated that they have reduced use, while the majority (46.2%) has mentioned that there hasn't been any change in their use. Due to various issues, a percentage of 17.3% have changed to other brands. This indicated that the pandemic has had a noticeable effect on tobacco use within the country.

Discussion

Tobacco related deaths are reported to be around 20,000 per year in Sri Lanka, which makes it a major concern for the well-being of the society. Long-term use of tobacco has been identified as a cause of several non-communicable diseases (NCD) thereby imposing a heavy burden on the country's economy as well. ADIC has been conducting trend surveys on tobacco consumption within Sri Lanka for many years, to identify the status of tobacco use within the country, and to use the data obtained through the surveys for effective implementation of tobacco control policies. The year 2021 had been a challenging year for the world as well as our country because of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aims to reveal the impact of the pandemic too on tobacco use among individuals.

For the study, only the male population in the selected districts was included as tobacco use among females in Sri Lanka is not very common yet. When obtaining survey responses, the age, education level and occupation of the respondents were also taken into consideration. Most of the respondents were lifetime abstainers, which indicates that more people are currently aware of the negative impact and health conditions related to tobacco consumption. Self-employed respondents and individuals from the cooperate sector reported the highest usage of tobacco products, which must be due to the ability to afford these products. In the meantime, the unemployed group have reported the lowest consumption rate. The unemployed group consisted of students, retired individuals and people who do not work at all. Therefore, financial barriers must have been the main reason for the low tobacco use among the unemployed group.

When considering the districts included in the survey, Colombo district reported the highest use. Since Colombo is the commercial capital of the country, the population is high and most of them are employed. Therefore, the availability and usage of tobacco-related products also seems to be high. Cigarettes, beedi and cigars are the most frequently used tobacco products in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the other products were not specified in the survey as the usage of such products is negligible compared to these three main products.

Regardless of the type of product, age of the respondents or the occupation, daily use is the most common method of consumption of tobacco products. 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 study participants (An amount of Rs. 80 – Rs. 67,000 is spent monthly on tobacco products). According to the study, people who use tobacco products daily are mostly 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 all occupational sectors.

Even at initiation of tobacco use, cigarette was reported to be the most prominently used product. And most of the study participants had initiated tobacco use between the ages 18-20 years, either with friends or at social gatherings (e.g.: parties). These results are mostly consistent with the previous findings. The initial experience of tobacco use was reported as unpleasant by majority of the users (7). The lack of knowledge on how tobacco is perceived as being pleasurable is one of the key determinants that drive this behaviour. Policy formulations are extremely important within the country, to stop or delay initiation as much as possible.

When considering the responses obtained from lifetime smokers regarding cessation of tobacco use, the majority (80%) has been unable to quit the habit, while only a small percentage has completely stopped smoking. The quitting was mostly done due to financial issues and COVID-19, while several other reasons were given by other age groups. This implies that most people are still not aware about the health issues related to tobacco smoking which is a major risk factor for most non-communicable diseases (cardiovascular disease, cancer, etc). Therefore, there is a strong need for implementation of more tobacco cessation programmes among vulnerable groups to spread awareness about the negative impact of tobacco use.

National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol Act No. 27 enacted in 2006 imposes the legal boundaries on selling tobacco and it is prohibited to sell tobacco products for individuals under the age 21 years. However, the study reveals that a percentage of 11% under the age 21 years is current smokers, which proves the violation of the act that was already established for tobacco control. Tobacco sales is carried out even for underage groups, neglecting the rules established by the relevant authorities.

From the study findings it is clear that, a national action plan is required including all strategies for tobacco control, which covers all policies that have been already formulated. And the involvement of media in such a task is vital to obtain the desired outcomes (6).

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