

Smokefree researchers call for stronger regulation of roll-your-own tobacco

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Credit: University of Otago

Smokefree researchers at the University of Otago are calling on policy makers to develop stronger regulation of roll-your-own (RYO) tobacco.

In a new paper published in the prestigious international journal *Tobacco Control*, ASPIRE2025 co-director Professor Janet Hoek and colleague Dr Shelagh Ferguson from the Department of Marketing explored factors underpinning the rising popularity of RYO [tobacco](#) among [young people](#).

Professor Hoek says that earlier work has concluded that RYO tobacco users find it less expensive per stick than manufactured cigarettes.

"Yet, as a cheaper form of tobacco, RYO has evoked stereotypes of

older, heavily addicted smokers that are very different from the image young people wish to communicate," she says.

"Young adults who use RYO tobacco face a dilemma. On the one hand, they want to smoke as cheaply as possible, but, on the other, they don't want to be associated with negative stereotypes."

The research team, which also involved summer student Erin Court and international collaborator Professor Karine Gallopel-Morvan of the EHESP School of Public Health in Rennes, undertook a detailed qualitative study involving 20 young adults to explore how they managed this dilemma.

"We found they associated positive attributes with RYO cigarettes – such as being more natural or 'organic', and less harmful." says Professor Hoek. "They also developed cigarette rolling rituals and saw the sticks they created as personal creations that provided them with social cachet."

The researchers probed how changing the colour of rolling paper would affect participants' views of RYO cigarettes and found an unattractive mustard colour could reduce their appeal.

When put in the context of earlier work into RYO tobacco use, the researchers point to several policy implications. "First, RYO tobacco remains less expensive than manufactured cigarettes, which means smokers may switch to RYO rather than quit. The government needs to remove this anomaly, introduce differential excise tax increases on rolling tobacco, and ensure there is no cost advantage in buying RYO tobacco," says Professor Hoek.

The researchers also suggest measures to make RYO cigarettes less appealing. "We need unattractively coloured rolling paper, and packaging used to contain rolling paper and filters should have to adopt

standardised packaging, which features an unappealing colour and large pictorial warnings."

The researchers also call on policy makers to address widely held misperceptions that RYO tobacco is more natural and less harmful than manufactured cigarettes. ASPIRE2025 co-director Professor Richard Edwards, who has examined these false beliefs in previous research, suggests there may be a place for educational interventions to correct misperceptions.

However, the researchers argue that if future studies continue to find high rates of RYO use and false beliefs about RYO, particularly among youth and [young adults](#), there would be grounds for banning RYO tobacco sales altogether.

Provided by University of Otago

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