

ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO SMOKING IN SOCIAL NETWORKS AND NORMATIVE BELIEFS ABOUT THE SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY OF SMOKING:

Findings from the ITC New Zealand Survey

Key findings:

Exposure to less smoking in social networks is associated with stronger smokefree normative beliefs among smokers.

Interventions designed to create smoke free thinking should ensure smokers are NOT marginalised.

Background

- Normative beliefs about the prevalence and social acceptability of smoking influence quitting behaviours.
- Concentrations of smoking within population sub-groups may create smoking norms and beliefs that reinforce smoking practices.

Study Aims

- Is higher exposure to smoking in social networks associated with negative beliefs about the social acceptability of smoking?

Methods

- Smoker sample (n=672) drawn from Wave 2 (Jul-Dec 2018) of the International Tobacco Control (ITC) NZ Survey.
- Respondents interviewed by Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing.
- Smoke Free Normative Beliefs (SFNB) explored by examining agreement with statements related to perceived social norms about smoking.
- Perceptions measured on a five-point scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.
- Analysis stratified by degree of exposure to smoking in social networks:
 - 'Higher exposure' (HE) to smoking in social network (n=420) defined as:
 - ≥ four of a participant's five closest friends smoked
 - OR reported exposure to SHS ≥ four times a week over the past month.
 - All other participants were allocated to the 'lower exposure' (LE) group (n=252).

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Disclosures/Conflict of Interest:

GTF has served as an expert witness on behalf of governments in litigation involving the tobacco industry. All other authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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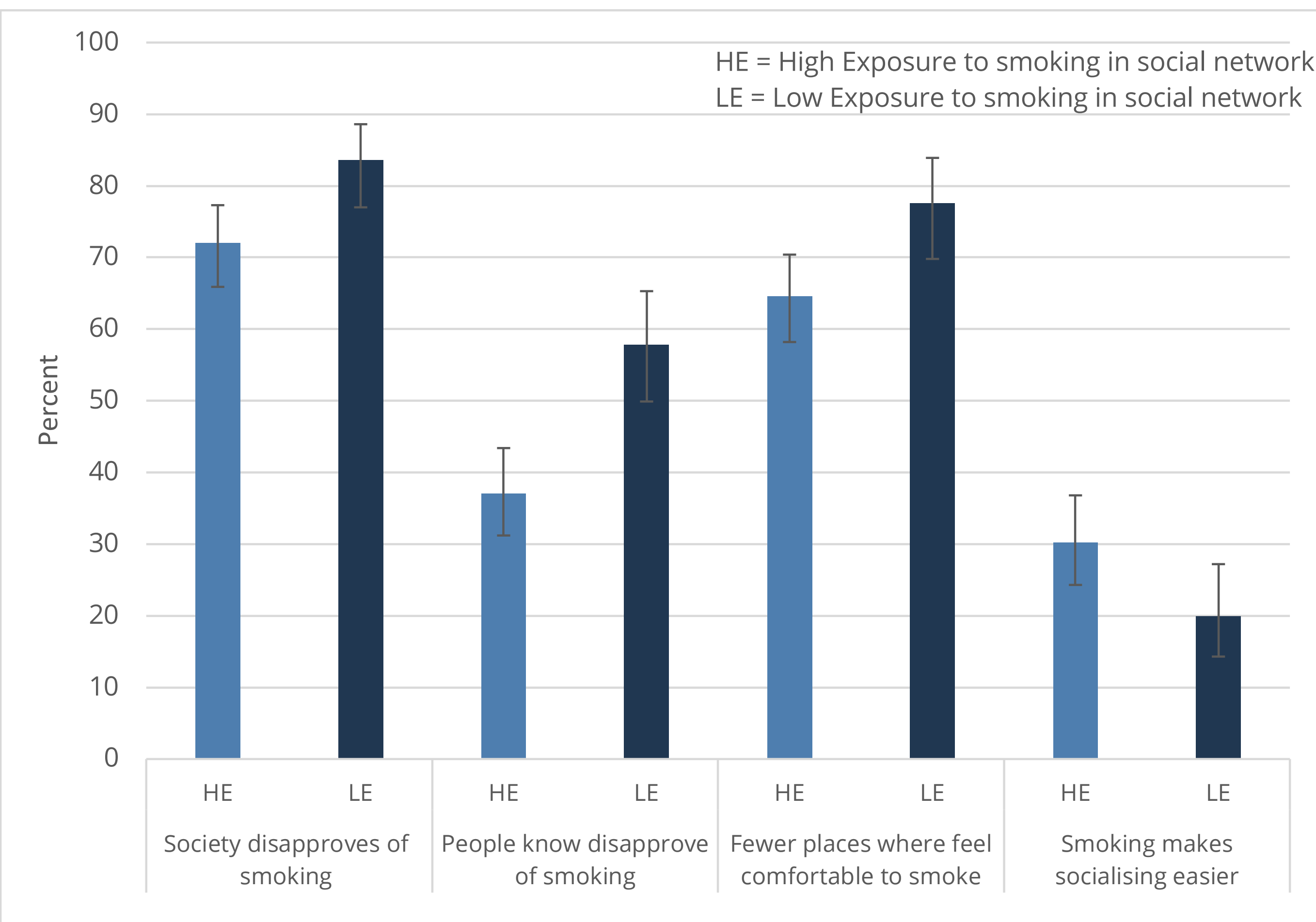
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Results

Figure 1. Perceived social norms about smoking by exposure to smoking in social network

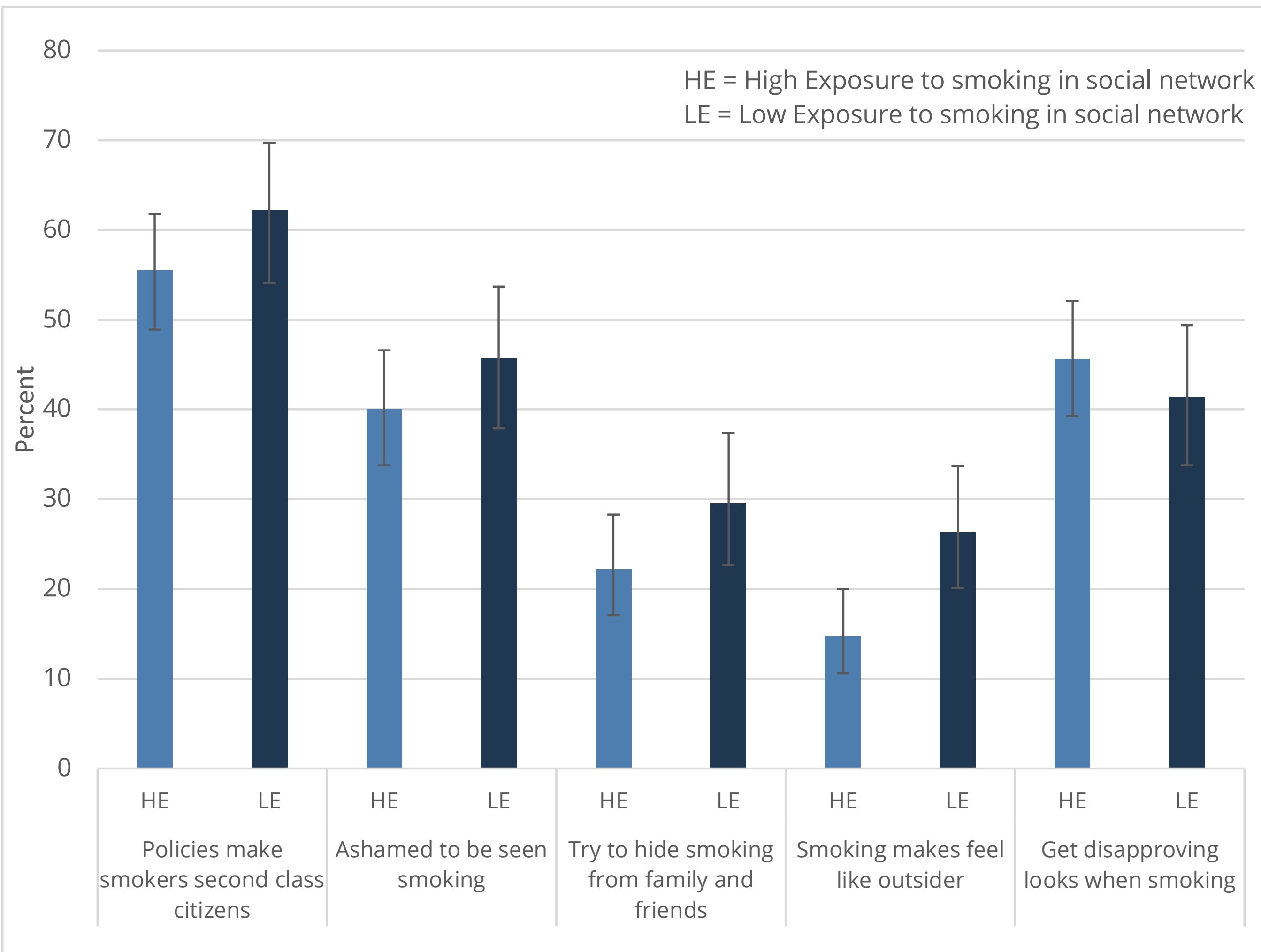


- Respondents with lower exposure to smokers in their social networks (LE) were significantly more likely to agree that people they knew disapproved of smoking and that there were fewer places they felt comfortable smoking.
- The lower exposure group was also more likely to think society disapproved of smoking.
- Among all respondents most (76%) agreed that society disapproved of smoking and over two-thirds (69%) agreed there were fewer places where they felt comfortable smoking.

Conclusions

- Exposure to lower levels of smoking within social networks is associated with higher levels of SFNB.
- Changes in social norms around how smoking behaviour is perceived may motivate quitting behaviour
 - **BUT** we must avoid marginalising smokers in this process and ensure they have the resources to quit smoking.
- Smokers heavily exposed to smoking in their social networks may be shielded from smoke free normative beliefs, which may reduce their motivation to quit.
- Population-level interventions designed to create SFNBs should ensure smokers, particularly those in priority groups, are not marginalised.

Figure 2. Feelings of smoking stigmatisation by exposure to smoking in social network



- In general, the lower exposure group was more likely to agree with any of the smoking stigmatisation statements (with the exception of 'receiving disapproving looks').
- Respondents in the low exposure group were significantly more likely to agree that their smoking made them feel like an outsider among their friends.
- Among all respondents the most commonly agreed to statement was that smokers were seen as second-class citizens (58%).

