

Smoking: Low income households

- Smoking rates are much higher among low income groups.
- Tobacco addiction, and the loss of income it causes, can exacerbate and lock people into poverty.
- Tobacco addiction further locks children from low income backgrounds into a cycle of inequality, by increasing their likelihood of smoking in later life.
- Tackling tobacco addiction is one of the most effective ways of eliminating health inequalities.

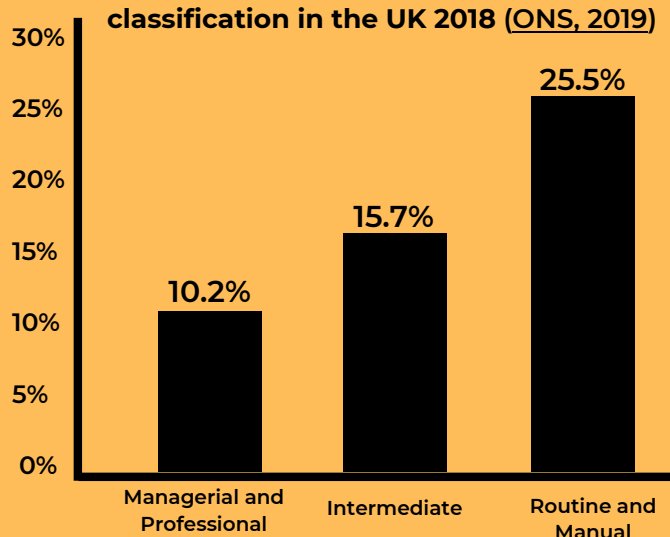
High rates of smoking perpetuate inequality for low income groups

Smoking is the single biggest cause of premature death in the UK and is responsible for at least half the difference in life expectancy between the richest and poorest in society (Marmot, 2010).

Whilst smoking rates across all socio-economic groups have declined over the years, large inequalities remain and have widened significantly since 2012 (ONS, 2019).

Inequality in smoking rates maintains the disproportionate burden of death and disease placed on people from low socio-economic groups and perpetuates health inequalities.

Smoking rates by socio-economic classification in the UK 2018 (ONS, 2019)

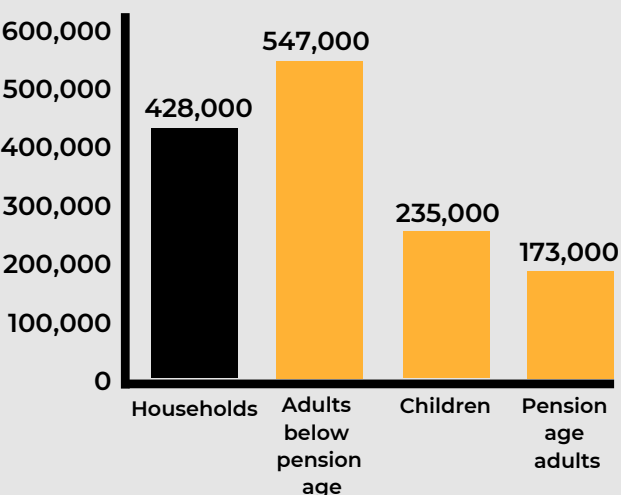


High smoking rates are also linked to indicators of disadvantage including unemployment, low educational attainment and mental health conditions, further compounding wider inequalities.



Smoking and Poverty

Number of households and people lifted out of poverty through returned tobacco expenditure (ASH, 2019)



Smokers from the C2DE social group are more likely to be more heavily addicted and to smoke more. On average, C2DE smokers consume more cigarettes per day and are more likely to have their first cigarette within 30 minutes of waking than those from higher socioeconomic groups (ASH/YouGov, Smokefree GB Survey 2019).

Tobacco addictions are financially burdensome and heavier addictions exacerbate this. ASH research shows that, in the UK, nearly 1.5 million households which include someone who smokes are currently in poverty, when the costs of tobacco addiction are accounted for. However, around 428,000 people could be lifted out of poverty if the cost of addiction was returned to the household, including around 235,000 children (ASH, 2019).

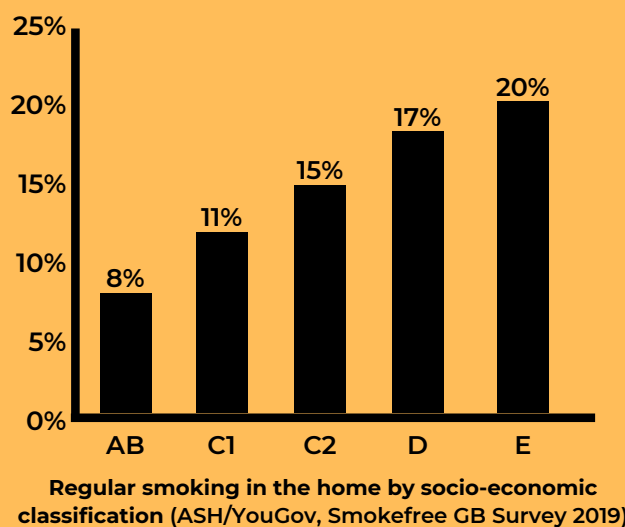
*Poverty defined as below 60% of equivalised Before Housing Costs (BHC) median income

Secondhand smoke

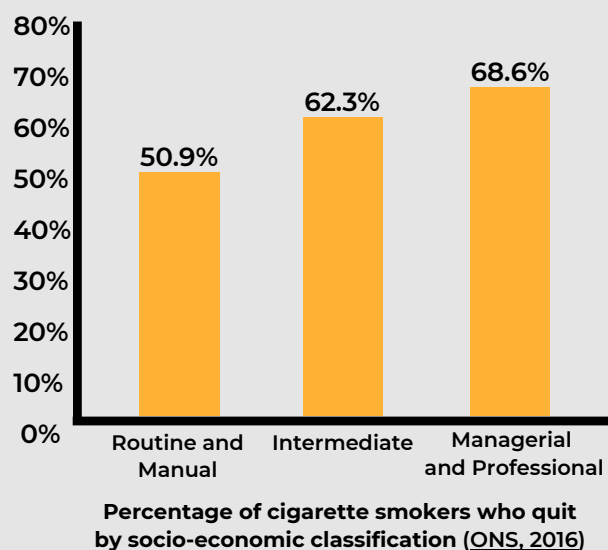
People from low socio-economic groups are also more likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke in the home. In response to the question: "Does anyone smoke in your home most days?" 20% of people in the social grade E group responded positively compared to 8% in the social grade AB group. This further exacerbates health inequalities by increasing the likelihood of experiencing smoking-related death and disease and compounding norms around smoking, making breaking away from tobacco addiction even more difficult.

Smoking in the home

Children with a parent who smokes are more likely to go on to smoke (NHS, 2017). It is estimated that each year at least 23,000 young people in England and Wales start smoking by the age of 15 as a result of exposure to smoking in the home (RCP, 2010). Higher rates of exposure to smoking in childhood maintains disproportionately high rates of smoking and tobacco addiction among low socio-economic groups (by leading to long-term tobacco addiction) thereby perpetuating inequality.



Low income smokers face greater barriers to quitting



Tobacco addiction generally forms in childhood and, once formed, it is difficult to break away from.

The majority of people who smoke want to stop (ONS, 2019) and, on average, all people who smoke make similar numbers of quit attempts each year however, wealthier smokers are more likely to succeed.

People from low socio-economic groups face greater barriers to quitting smoking, experiencing higher levels of addiction, increased stress related to material hardship and higher rates of smoking amongst friends and family (Hiscock R et al, 2015).

Local authority action to reduce smoking among low income groups

- 1. Target stop smoking support.** Local stop smoking services can reduce smoking inequalities by targeting groups with higher rates of smoking (Cancer Research UK, 2018). This can include innovative approaches to reaching people who smoke such as via housing associations and debt advice services (ASH, 2018).
- 2. Tackle illegal tobacco.** Cheap illegal tobacco fuels teen smoking, worsens health inequalities and is linked to wider organised crime. Local authorities should work collaboratively across regions with each other, police and HMRC to reduce the demand and supply.
- 3. Support national action.** Some of the most effective measures to tackle smoking in disadvantaged communities happen at a national level, such as ensuring adequate funding is available for mass media campaigns and increasing taxes on tobacco products (APPG on Smoking and Health, 2019).