



## Youth Smoking Survey (Number 8)

### Smoking Cessation and Québec Students: 2006–2007 to 2010–2011

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information



formation



recherche



coopération  
internationale

#### BACKGROUND

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Tobacco control has been a public health priority in Québec for close to twenty years. It was established as a result of a significant increase in budgets and resources dedicated to the development and implementation of measures to prevent young people from smoking, to encourage smokers to stop smoking, and to protect non-smokers from involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke. These objectives are found in the Plan québécois de lutte contre le tabagisme [Québec tobacco control plan] (Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux 2001, 2006).

Because of the financial support of the ministry of health and social services, several interventions aiming to motivate and support smokers in freeing themselves of their tobacco dependence were implemented:

- *iQuitnow* telephone helpline and Website;
- close to 160 quit smoking centres offering individual or group quit smoking services;
- reimbursement by public and private drug insurance plans for pharmacological aids for quitting smoking;
- annual media campaigns encouraging smokers to decide to quit smoking and informing them about the resources available to support them;
- *Quit to Win! Challenge* present in the media landscape since 2000, encouraging smokers to abstain from tobacco for at least six weeks (Tremblay and Roy, 2013).

Furthermore, since 2005, Quebecers have been living in an increasingly stringent environment regarding tobacco use. In fact, it is prohibited to smoke in a great many locations, including public places, restaurants, bars, primary and secondary school grounds, and within a radius of nine metres from the doors of health care institutions, CEGEPs (general and vocational colleges) and universities. Also, the promotion, visibility and accessibility of tobacco products have been significantly reduced.

Over the years, specific efforts have been made to reach young people so that, on the one hand, they do not become tobacco-dependent, and on the other hand, they stop smoking. Several interventions have been developed specifically for them, as for example the youth coalition against smoking, the *De Facto* campaign, and the *iQuitnow* Website for adolescents. The few data available suggest that smoking cessation services such as the quit smoking centres, and the *iQuitnow* telephone helpline and Web site attract few adolescents (Montreuil, 2012; Tremblay and Roy, 2013), which is not at all surprising, since young people say that their favoured means for quitting smoking is to do it alone or with a friend (Dubé et al., 2009; Kischuck et al., 2004). According to the most recent data of the Québec Survey on Smoking, Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling in High School Students collected in 2008, close to six young smokers in ten reported having tried to quit smoking during the year preceding the survey (Dubé et al., 2009). Adolescents therefore want to quit smoking and they may perhaps have been influenced by the various media campaigns and measures on quitting smoking that have been deployed.

In such a context, and because more recent survey data are now available (2010–2011 Youth Smoking Survey), it seemed important to us to investigate whether the students' attempts to quit smoking had evolved in recent years, as a confirmation of the important changes in social standards now promoting the non-use of tobacco in Québec. We were also interested in the students' attempts to quit smoking based on the number of cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes and the fact they considered themselves to be smokers.

## QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH SMOKING SURVEY (YSS), 2006–2007 TO 2010–2011

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The data used are from the 2006–2007 to 2010–2011 editions of the YSS. The group covered in the present document consists of students from primary 6 to secondary 5 who have ever smoked a whole cigarette during their lifetimes.

### *Attempt to quit smoking, 2006–2007 to 2010–2011*

The question aiming to evaluate the proportion of students who have ever tried to quit smoking was expressed as follows: "Have you ever tried to quit smoking cigarettes?" This question, found in the 2006–2007 and 2010–2011 editions of the YSS, is meant to be more precise than that of the 2008–2009 edition which did not specifically mention cigarettes. The students were asked to answer by choosing from among the following responses: "I have only smoked a few times; I have never tried to quit; I have tried to quit once; I have tried to quit 2 or 3 times; I have tried to quit 4 or 5 times; I have tried to quit 6 or more times." **Students who answered that they had already tried to quit one or more times were considered as having tried to quit smoking during their lifetimes.** The students who did not answer the question (partial non-response) were excluded from the analyses.

### *The number of whole cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes, 2006–2007 to 2010–2011*

Youth smoking surveillance surveys use the fact of having smoked cigarettes in the 30 days preceding the survey to establish the status of "smoker." Also, the number of whole cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes makes it possible to differentiate *beginning* smokers, namely those who indicate having smoked 1 to 99 cigarettes, from *current* smokers (daily and occasional), meaning those who report having smoked 100 or more cigarettes.

In the YSS, the number of cigarettes smoked by the students in their lifetimes is determined by two questions, namely "Have you ever smoked a whole cigarette? (yes, no)" and "Have you ever smoked 100 or more whole cigarettes in your life? (yes, no)." Students who did not answer either of these two questions (partial non-response) were excluded from the analyses. Furthermore, it is important to note that the variable dealing with the fact of having smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetimes corresponds to the respondent's perception, and does not necessarily take into account the actual number of cigarettes smoked in that respondent's life.

#### *Self-identification as a smoker, 2006–2007 to 2010–2011*

At the beginning of the questionnaire, one question evaluated whether the students considered themselves to be smokers or not. This question has remained the same in each of the editions of the YSS since 2006: "Are you a smoker?" The choices of answers to this question were: "Yes; No." We considered that students who answered "yes" to this question identified themselves as smokers. Students who did not answer the question (partial non-response) were excluded from the analyses.

To take into account both the students' perception of having smoked 100 cigarettes or not in their lifetimes and their identification as smokers, the proportion of students who had ever tried to quit smoking is presented for four distinct groups of students. These groups are: 1) students who have smoked 100 or more cigarettes and who identify themselves as smokers; 2) students who have smoked 100 or more cigarettes and who do not identify themselves as smokers; 3) students who have smoked between 1 and 99 cigarettes and who identify themselves as smokers; 4) students who have smoked between 1 and 99 cigarettes and who do not identify themselves as smokers.

## RESULTS

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### *Distribution of the sample in relation to smoking status, 2010–2011*

The distribution of the students in relation to their smoking status is presented first, in order to better situate the population addressed by the subsequent analyses (Table 1). As shown, the great majority of students in Québec and in the rest of Canada are non-smokers, meaning that they have never smoked a whole cigarette.

The next results will deal with the population of students who have ever smoked a whole cigarette, namely daily, occasional and beginning smokers as well as former smokers and former experimenters. This population represents approximately 18.5% of Québec students and 11.8% of students in Canadian provinces other than Québec.

**Table 1** Distribution of students based on their smoking status (students in primary grade 6 to secondary 5, Québec, and Canada not including Québec, 2010–2011)

		Québec	Canada, not including Québec
Consumption of at least one whole cigarette in their lifetimes		18.5 [17.7 – 19.3]	11.8 [11.4 – 12.2]
100 or more cigarettes in their lifetimes	Daily smokers	2.6 [2.3 – 2.9]	1.8 [1.7 – 1.9]
Daily use last 30 days			
100 or more cigarettes in their lifetimes	Occasional smokers	3.1 [2.9 – 3.3]	2.2 [2.1 – 2.3]
Non-daily use last 30 days			
1 to 99 cigarettes in their lifetimes	Beginning smokers	4.4 [4.1 – 4.8]	3.3 [3.2 – 3.4]
Use last 30 days			
100 or more cigarettes in their lifetimes	Former smokers	0.8 <sup>E</sup> [0.7 – 0.9]	0.6 [0.6 – 0.6]
No use last 30 days			
1 to 99 cigarettes in their lifetimes	Past experimenters	7.5 [7.1 – 7.9]	3.9 [3.8 – 4.1]
No use last 30 days			
No consumption or only took a few puffs in their lifetimes <sup>1</sup>		81.5 [80.7 – 82.4]	88.2 [87.8 – 88.6]

<sup>1</sup> These students were considered non-smokers and were not included in subsequent analyses.

<sup>E</sup> High coefficient of variation (CV between 16.6% and 33.3%); interpret with caution.

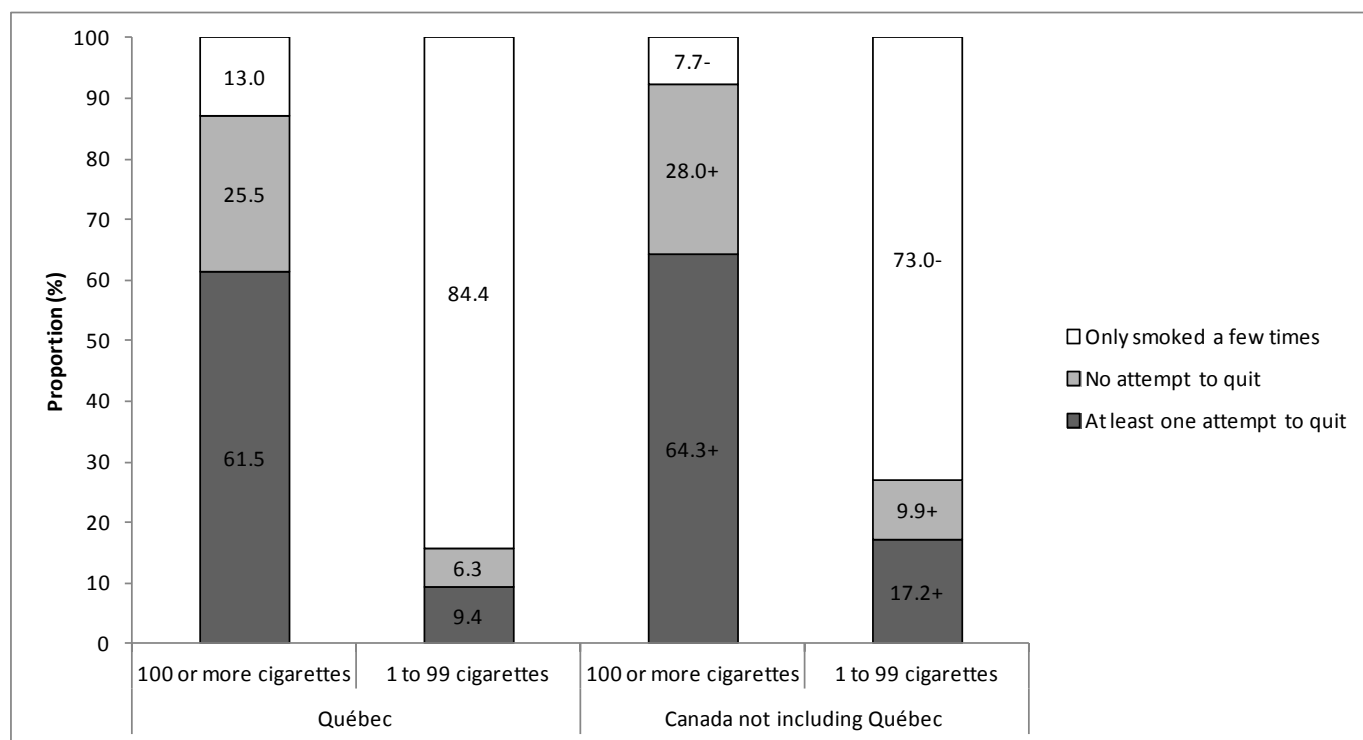
### Attempt to quit smoking in relation to the number of cigarettes smoked, 2010–2011

We analyzed the distribution of students based on their answers to the question about quitting smoking, and in relation to the number of cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes (Figure 1). Among the students who reported having smoked 100 or more cigarettes in their lifetimes, the majority indicated that they had already tried to quit smoking (61.5% in Québec and 64.3% in

the rest of Canada) while approximately one quarter of them had never tried to quit smoking (25.5% in Québec and 28.0% in the rest of Canada). The picture was very different with students who had smoked fewer than 100 cigarettes, where the great majority reported that they had "only smoked a few times" (84.4% in Québec and 73.0% in the rest of Canada) and only a minority had ever tried to quit smoking (9.4% in Québec and 17.2% in the rest of Canada).

Comparison of Québec data with that obtained for the rest of Canada indicated that a significantly lower proportion of students in Québec had ever tried to quit smoking, both for students having smoked 1 to

99 cigarettes and for those having smoked 100 or more cigarettes. However, proportionally more of these two groups of Québec students reported having only smoked a few times.



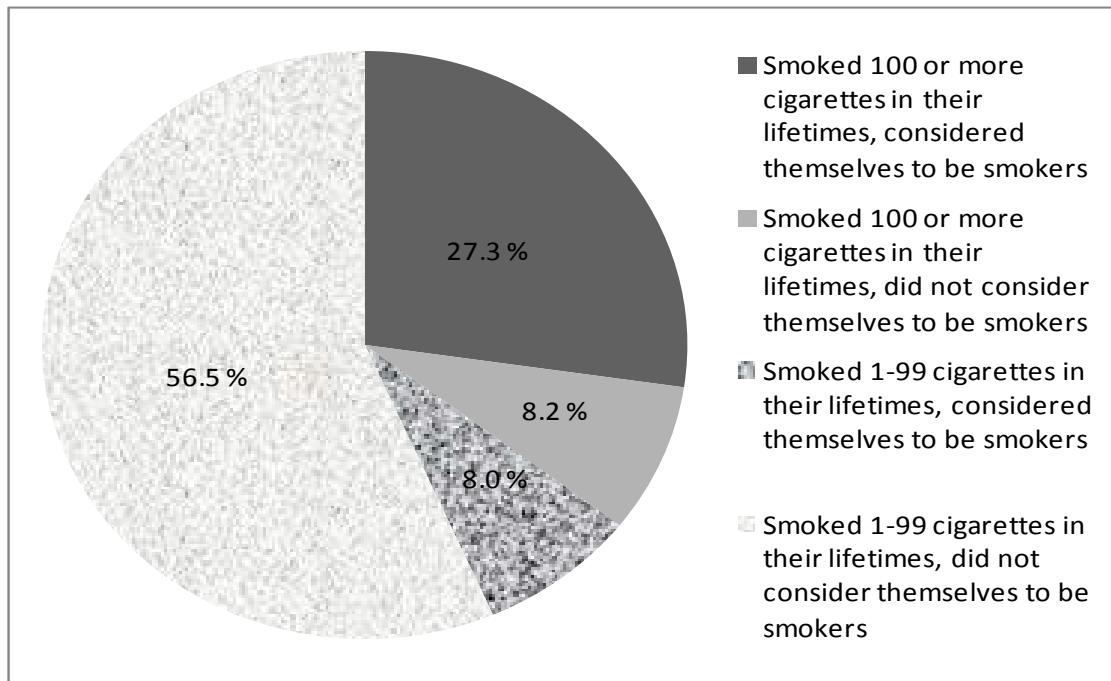
**Figure 1** Distribution of students in relation to ever having attempted to quit smoking, by number of cigarettes smoked (students in primary grade 6 to secondary 5, Québec, and Canada not including Québec, 2010–2011)

- significantly smaller proportion than that observed in Québec ( $p < .05$ ).
- + significantly greater proportion than that observed in Québec ( $p < .05$ ).

### *Number of cigarettes smoked and identifying as a smoker, 2010–2011*

Of all the students who had smoked at least one whole cigarette in their lifetimes, slightly more than half (56.5%) reported having smoked from 1 to 99 cigarettes and did not consider themselves to be smokers (Figure 2). Furthermore, slightly more than one in four students had smoked 100 or more cigarettes in their lifetimes and considered themselves

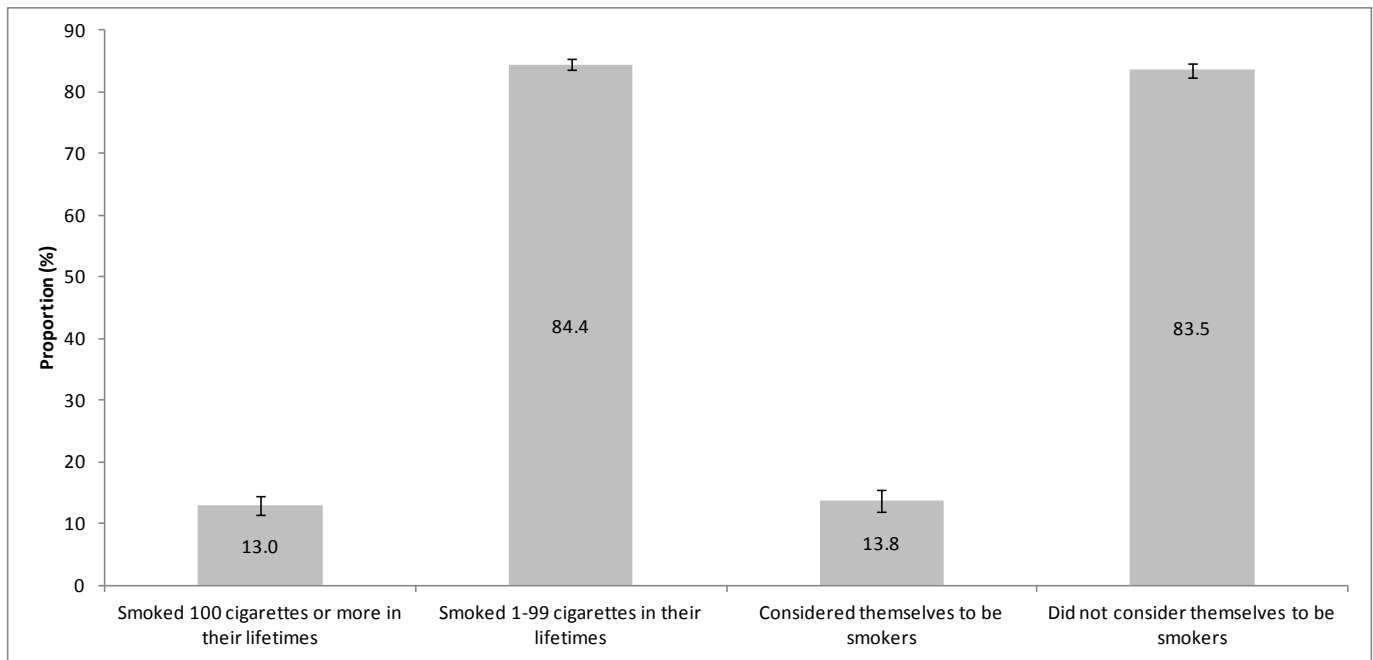
to be smokers (27.3%). This shows that a majority of Québec students who reported having smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetimes considered themselves to be smokers, while this was the case for a minority of students having smoked between 1 and 99 cigarettes. A significantly higher proportion of the students in the rest of Canada than students in Québec identified themselves as smokers, whether or not they had smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetimes (data not shown).



**Figure 2** Distribution of students by number of cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes and by identifying as a smoker (students in primary 6 to secondary 5, Québec, 2010–2011)

From the standpoint of a better understanding of the profile of students who reported "having only smoked a few times" in their lives, additional analyses were carried out on the basis of the number of cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes and identifying as a smoker. The vast majority of the students not identifying themselves as smokers and who had smoked between 1 and 99 cigarettes in their lifetimes chose this answer option rather than indicating having tried to quit smoking or not (Figure 3). Conversely, a very small minority of the students identifying themselves as

smokers and who had smoked 100 or more cigarettes in their lifetimes reported "having only smoked a few times." Based on the number of cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes, smaller proportions of students in the rest of Canada than in Québec indicated having only smoked a few times (data not shown). However, the analysis done on the basis of identifying as a smoker shows no significant difference between Québec students and those in all of the other provinces (data not shown).

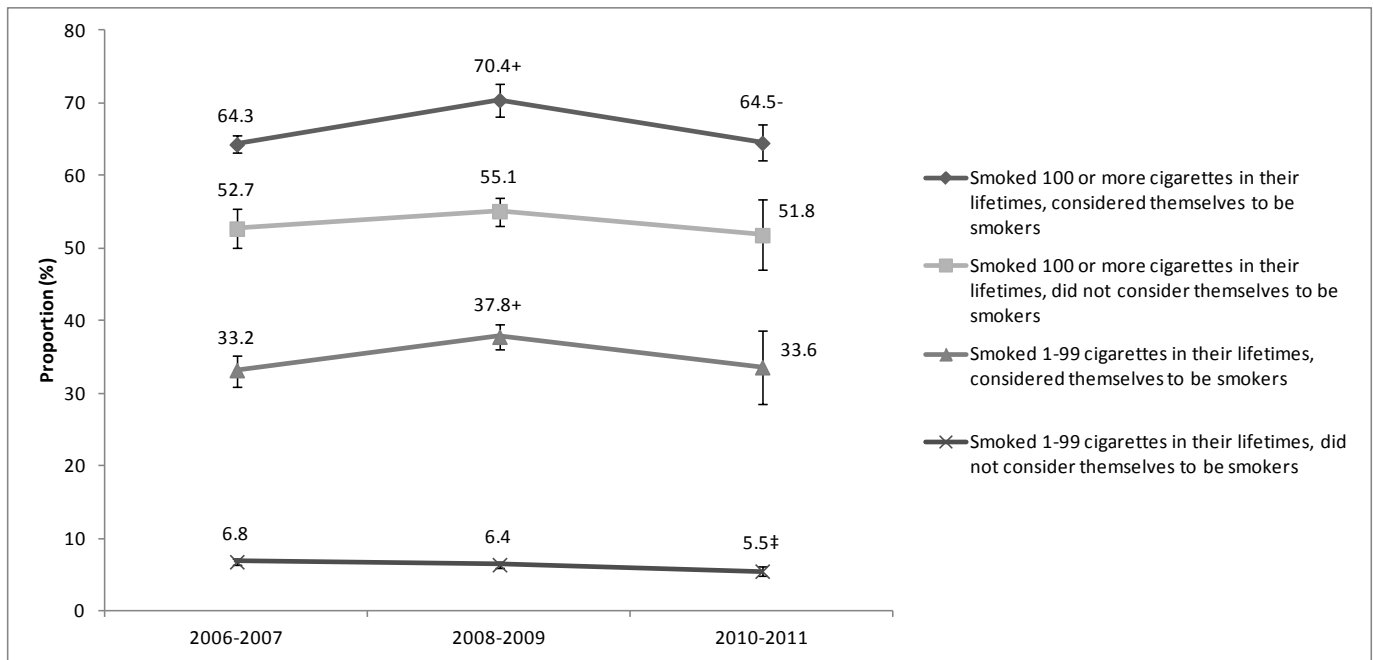


**Figure 3** Proportion of students who indicated having only smoked a few times in their lifetimes, according to number of cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes or by self-identification as smokers or not (students from primary 6 to secondary 5, Québec, 2010–2011)

*Attempt to quit smoking in relation to identifying as a smoker and the number of cigarettes smoked, 2006–2007 to 2010–2011*

The proportion of Québec students who had tried to quit smoking remained relatively stable between 2006–2007 and 2010–2011 (Figure 4). Furthermore, it appears that proportionally more Québec students who had smoked 100 or more cigarettes in their lifetimes had tried to quit smoking than had those who indicated having smoked between 1 and 99 cigarettes. Students identifying themselves as smokers would also have been more likely to have tried to quit smoking than those who did not consider themselves to be smokers.

As Figure 4 shows, more than 60% (64.5%) of the students who had smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetimes AND considered themselves to be smokers in 2010–2011 had tried to quit smoking. More than half (51.8%) of the students who had smoked at least 100 cigarettes without considering themselves to be smokers had tried to quit smoking. Of the students who had smoked between 1 and 99 cigarettes in their lifetimes, proportionally more of those that considered themselves to be smokers had tried to quit smoking compared to those who did not consider themselves to be smokers (33.6% compared to 5.5%).



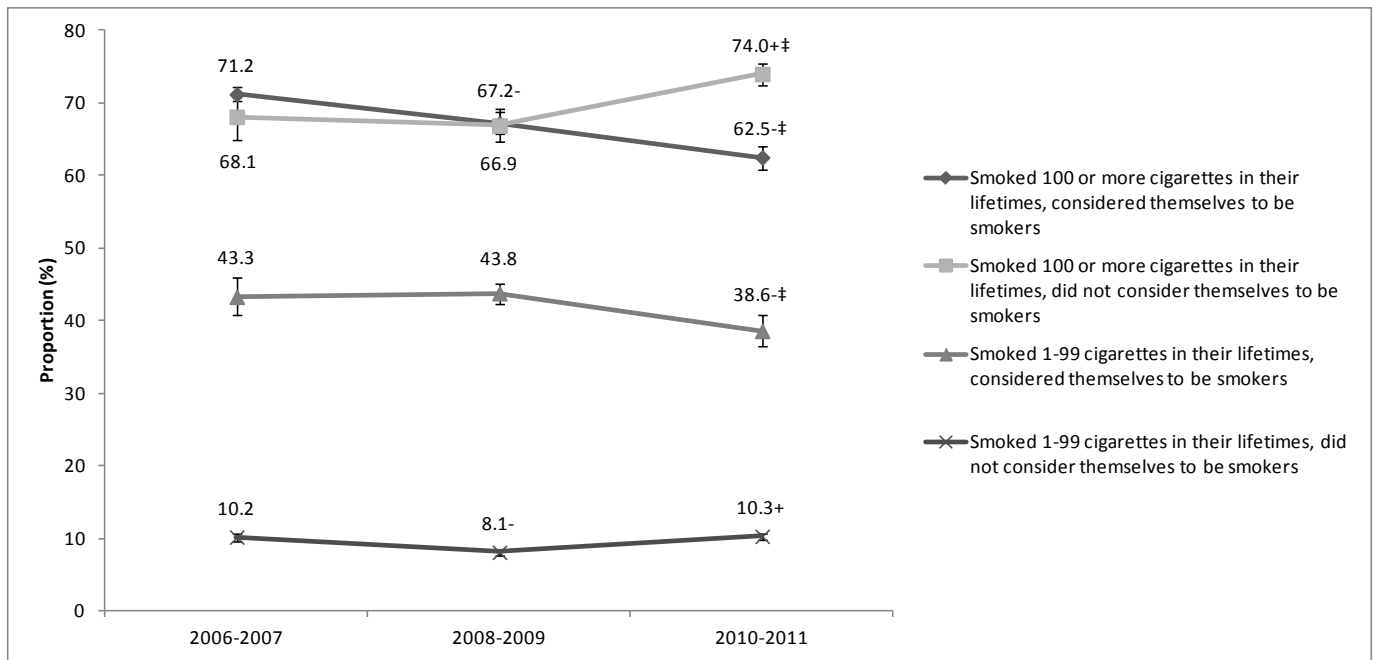
**Figure 4** Proportion of students who had ever tried to quit smoking, based on identifying as a smoker and the number of cigarettes smoked during their lifetimes (students from primary 6 to secondary 5, Québec, 2006–2007 to 2010–2011)

- proportion significantly lower than that observed in the previous edition of the survey ( $p < .05$ ).
- + proportion significantly greater than that observed in the previous edition of the survey ( $p < .05$ ).
- ‡ proportion significantly different from that observed in 2006–2007 ( $p < .05$ ).

The situation observed in all of the other Canadian provinces regarding the attempt to quit smoking differed slightly from that seen in Québec (Figure 5). In fact, a surprising result was noted in 2010–2011 for students who had smoked 100 or more cigarettes in their lifetimes: the proportion who reported having tried to quit smoking was higher in those who did not consider themselves to be smokers (74.0%) compared

to those who considered themselves to be smokers (62.5%). Other studies would be necessary to better understand this result.

In general, the proportion of students having ever tried to quit smoking was greater in the rest of Canada than in Québec. Particularly marked differences were observed in students not identifying themselves as smokers.



**Figure 5** Proportion of students who had ever tried to quit smoking, based on identifying as a smoker and the number of cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes (students from primary 6 to secondary 5, Canada not including Québec, 2006–2007 to 2010–2011)

- proportion significantly lower than that observed in the previous edition of the survey ( $p < .05$ ).
- + proportion significantly greater than that observed in the previous edition of the survey ( $p < .05$ ).
- ‡ proportion significantly different from that observed in 2006–2007 ( $p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

From the analyzed data, it is impossible to state that a higher proportion of Québec students tried to quit smoking in 2010–2011 than in 2006–2007. This was also the case within the Québec population 15 years of age and older (Lasnier and Leclerc, 2012). However, it is important to mention several interesting observations that emerged from our analyses and that deserve some reflection.

Of those students who reported having smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetimes:

- Close to two out of three indicated that they had tried to quit smoking;

- Those who considered themselves to be smokers were more likely to have tried to quit smoking than those who did not consider themselves to be smokers;
- Slightly more than half of those who did not call themselves smokers had tried to quit smoking.

Of the students who reported having smoked between 1 and 99 cigarettes in their lifetimes:

- The great majority answered the question about the number of attempts to quit smoking by checking the answer choice "I have only smoked a few times";
- Only a minority of students indicated having ever tried to quit smoking;

- Compared to students who did not consider themselves to be smokers, students who considered themselves to be smokers were found to be in a 6 times higher proportion to have ever tried to quit smoking.

These observations, generally found in the rest of Canada, illustrate the role that the student's identifying as a smoker could play in quitting smoking. The study by Okoli et al. carried out a few years ago provides an interesting clarification (Okoli et al., 2008). These researchers examined the relationships between different smoker identities, the perceived levels of addiction, and different smoking behaviour taxonomies commonly used by youth. They realized that the level of "physical" or "mental" addiction depended on whether the young person identified him or herself as a non-smoker, an ex-smoker, an occasional smoker, a social smoker, an irregular smoker, a regular smoker, or a heavy smoker. Thus, for example, the addiction reported by the surveyed young people was more common for a regular smoker than for an occasional smoker.

Furthermore, the results of the studies carried out by the teams of O'Loughlin and Di Franza cast doubt on the rapidity with which addiction to tobacco products develops (Di Franza et al., 2002; O'Loughlin et al., 2009). While it was previously thought that one had to experiment with tobacco over a period of a few years or have smoked at least 100 cigarettes (the equivalent of four packs of cigarettes) before developing an addiction, these researchers observed that:

- 25% of young people feel their first addiction symptom, very often a strong desire to smoke, only a few months after having inhaled their first puff;
- One adolescent in five who smokes every week feels one or more addiction symptoms;
- The strong desire to smoke and symptoms of withdrawal occur before the adolescent has smoked 100 cigarettes in his or her lifetime (O'Loughlin et al., 2009).

Thus, the fact that the majority of students who have smoked fewer than 100 cigarettes in their lifetimes do not consider themselves to be smokers is of concern. In fact, if they do not identify themselves as smokers, it is possible that they are not very worried about quitting smoking, while some of them are already feeling addiction symptoms that they possibly do not recognize. Also, the quit smoking messages aimed at them are probably not getting through to them.

The results obtained show the complexity of dealing with the theme of quitting smoking in a clientele of young smokers, since a major proportion of them do not see themselves as smokers and think that they have not smoked often enough and long enough to consider quitting smoking. This also raises the question of the definition of quitting smoking for young people who are experimenting with tobacco. Currently, there seems to be little consensus within the scientific community and communities of practice about what it means to quit smoking for young people with irregular consumption, as well as about the way this process should be addressed with young people.

### *Methodological questioning*

From a methodological perspective, one can question the meaning given by students to the answer choice "I have only smoked a few times" when asked about quitting smoking. Do they want to indicate that they have never tried to quit smoking because they didn't see its usefulness, or on the contrary, because they had already tried to quit smoking without however considering their efforts as an attempt to quit smoking? From the standpoint of public health research and intervention, this choice of answer involves some vagueness, making it difficult to interpret the results obtained and to apply them for practical purposes.

## *Limitations*

The present study has certain limitations. First, the students are asked to estimate the number of cigarettes smoked during their lives, which does not necessarily correspond to the actual number of cigarettes smoked. Next, the number of cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes was categorized dichotomously (1 to 99 cigarettes; 100 or more cigarettes). Youth who have smoked fewer than 100 cigarettes probably make up a heterogeneous group regarding their smoking experience. For example, one might think that young people who have smoked between 80 and 99 cigarettes differ in their identifying as smokers as compared to young people who have smoked about ten cigarettes during their lifetimes. Finally, it seems that the associations identified between quitting smoking, the fact of considering oneself a smoker, and the perception of having smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetimes are likely influenced by other variables that were not taken into consideration in our analyses.

## **CONCLUSION**

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A better understanding of the factors that can cause smoking students to quit using tobacco as quickly as possible following their initiation can mainly be obtained by acquiring knowledge about how young people perceive their own use of tobacco and the link with nicotine addiction. From the interventional standpoint, it seems a priority to make students aware of the fact that tobacco addiction can still occur after smoking a few times, and that it is very difficult to overcome.

Future research could verify whether the proportions of students who identify themselves as smokers or who have smoked 100 or more cigarettes in their lifetimes vary significantly over time, which could possibly have an impact on the attempt to quit smoking. Another avenue of research could result from the investigation of the variable describing the number of cigarettes smoked on each of the days in the last week, which would make it possible to link the fact of whether one considers oneself a smoker or not to certain tobacco consumption routines (e.g., consumption of cigarettes only during the weekend). Such analyses would certainly contribute to a better understanding of the links between identification as a smoker, the perception of the number of cigarettes smoked in their lifetimes, and smoking cessation among youth in a school environment.

## ABOUT THE CANADIAN YOUTH SMOKING SURVEY

The first Youth Smoking Survey (YSS) was conducted in 1994 by Statistics Canada for Health Canada; subsequent surveys have been conducted biennially since 2002. Since 2004, the YSS has been the subject of an agreement between Health Canada and the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact of the University of Waterloo. In Québec, the study was conducted on two occasions by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ) [Québec public health institute], in collaboration with McGill University (2004–2005) and the CHUM research centre (2006–2007). The Québec component of the 2008–2009 survey was conducted by the CHUM research centre, while the 2010–2011 survey was conducted by Québec en Forme. This survey differs from the Québec Survey on Smoking, Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling in High School Students, carried out on a biennial basis by the Institut de la Statistique du Québec from 1998 to 2008.

Data for the 2010–2011 edition of the YSS were collected from October 2010 to June 2011, and recruitment in school boards and schools began in February and April 2010 respectively. Among the selected schools, all students in the educational levels targeted by the survey were eligible to be included in the final sample. The questionnaire was held in the classrooms.

In 1994, 1 303 students in Québec and 9 491 students in Canada (5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade) participated in the first YSS. In 2002, 3 229 students in Québec and 19 018 students in Canada (5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade) participated in the second YSS. In 2004–2005, 3 644 students in Québec and 29 243 students in Canada (5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade) participated in the third YSS. In 2006–2007, 12 963 students in Québec and 71 003 students in Canada (5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade) participated in the fourth YSS. In 2008–2009, 8 446 students in Québec and 51 922 students in Canada (6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade) participated in the fifth YSS. In 2010–2011, 4 266 students in Québec and 50 949 students in Canada (6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade) participated in the sixth YSS.

This analysis is based on anonymized data from the public use microdata files of the Youth Smoking Survey, 2004–2005 to 2010–2011, University of Waterloo. Calculation and interpretation of the data presented in this document was the authors' responsibility.

The estimations and confidence intervals were calculated according to the recommendations of the Main Microdata User Guide of the YSS survey, by using all of the 500 bootstrap weights accompanying the survey data. Determination of the statistical significance of a comparison between two estimates is based on the results of the proportion difference tests, also using the bootstrap weights. The Bonferroni correction was applied when multiple proportion comparisons were done. It should be noted that the difference tests used are less conservative than the comparison of the confidence intervals related to the proportions. They are therefore likely to identify significant statistical relationships that would not be shown by the comparison of confidence intervals.

The YSS survey has a few methodological limitations. First, the information collected from the respondents is self-reported and may consequently be subject to a recall bias or social desirability bias. Also, it must be mentioned that certain subgroups of youth were not included in the target population, more precisely youth living in the Yukon, Northwest Territories or Nunavut, youth living in institutions or on a First Nations reserve, youth attending special schools or schools located on a military base, as well as youth not in a school environment (e.g., dropouts). Finally, the province of New Brunswick did not participate in the 2010–2011 YSS.

For more information on the methodology used in the YSS, consult the survey's Website at the following address: [www.yss.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.yss.uwaterloo.ca).

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