

# The Prevalence of Smoking Among Two Homeless Populations in Southern California

The report was prepared by Sofia Herrera, PhD and Joe Colletti, PhD.  
Institute for Urban Initiatives ([www.urban-initiatives.org](http://www.urban-initiatives.org))

The prevalence of smoking is much higher among the homeless population than the general population. Recent research has revealed that around 20% of adults within the general population are smokers and 60% or more of adults within the homeless population are smokers.<sup>1</sup> This paper focuses on the pervasiveness of smoking among the homeless populations in the City of Pasadena and County of Ventura which are two jurisdictions located in Southern California.

## I. Methodology

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A homeless survey was administered to approximately one-fourth of the homeless population that was counted during the City of Pasadena and the County of Ventura homeless counts during January of 2010. The survey, which was conducted during the months of February and March, was designed to collect a wide-range of information from homeless persons as well as to assess their service needs using questions that focused on several areas including: age, community ties, domestic violence, education, ethnicity, familial status, gender, geo-history, health status, income, length of time homeless, mental health, religious experiences, substance abuse history, and veteran status.<sup>2</sup>

The questions concerning smoking included

- Do you smoke?
- How many cigarettes do you smoke per day? (the range of possible answers were “less than one pack; one pack; or two or more packs”);
- How interested are you in quitting smoking? (the range of possible answers were “not interested; somewhat interested; or very interested”).

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1 Apollonio, D. E., & Malone, R. E. (2005). Marketing to the marginalized: Tobacco industry targeting of the homeless and mentally ill. *Tobacco Control*, 14 (6), pp. 409-415; “Tobacco Use and Homelessness,” published by the National Coalition for the Homeless, July 2009.

2 Copies of these reports including questionnaires can be found on the following web site: [www.urban-initiatives.org](http://www.urban-initiatives.org).

## II. Findings

**Table 1. Percentage of Persons Who Smoke**

	Pasadena	Ventura County
	%	%
Do You Smoke?	63	60

The percent of homeless persons who smoked in the City of Pasadena and the County of Ventura supports recent research that noted that 60% or more of homeless persons smoke. Of the 230 survey respondents who completed the Pasadena survey, nearly two-thirds (63%) or 145 stated “yes” and 259 or 60% of the 431 persons who completed the Ventura County survey stated “yes.”

As shown in the table below, the majority of the survey respondents 108 or 74% who completed the Pasadena survey smoked less than one pack of cigarettes per day. About one-fourth smoked one pack or more per day—30 or 21% stated one pack and seven or 5% stated two or more packs. When asked if they were interested in quitting, 55 or more than one-third (38%) stated not interested, 41 or more than one-fourth (28%) stated somewhat interested, and 47 or nearly one-third (32%) stated very interested.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2. Quantity of Cigarettes and Level of Interest in Quitting**

	Pasadena	Ventura County
	%	%
How many cigarettes do you smoke per day?		
less than one pack	74	70
one pack	21	25
two or more packs	5	5
How interested are you in quitting smoking?		
not interested	38	34
somewhat interested	28	23
very interested	32	41

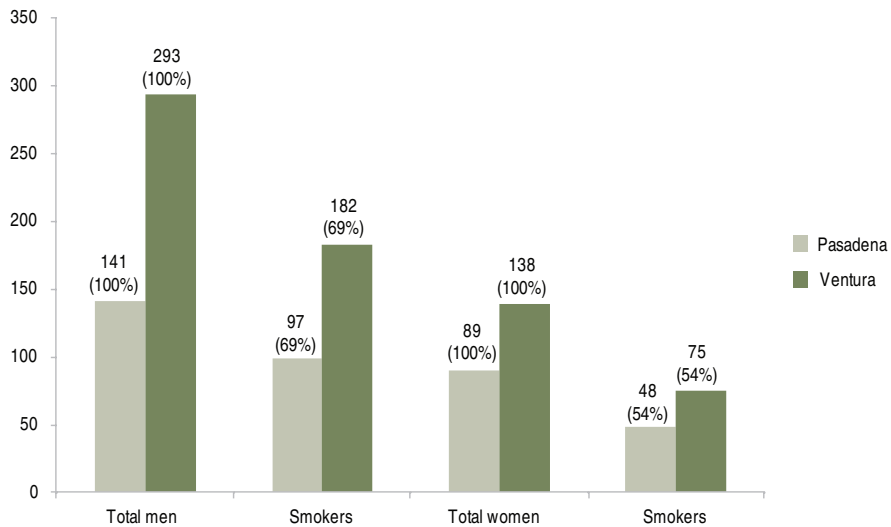
<sup>3</sup> Two survey respondents did not answer the question about quitting smoking.

The majority of the survey respondents 181 or 70% who completed the Ventura County survey smoked less than one pack of cigarettes per day. Thirty percent (30%) smoked one pack or more per day—65 or 25% stated one pack and 12 or 5% stated two or more packs. When asked if they were interested in quitting, 87 or one-third (34%) stated not interested, 60 or nearly one-fourth (23%) stated somewhat interested, and 106 or 41% stated very interested.

### Homeless Subpopulations

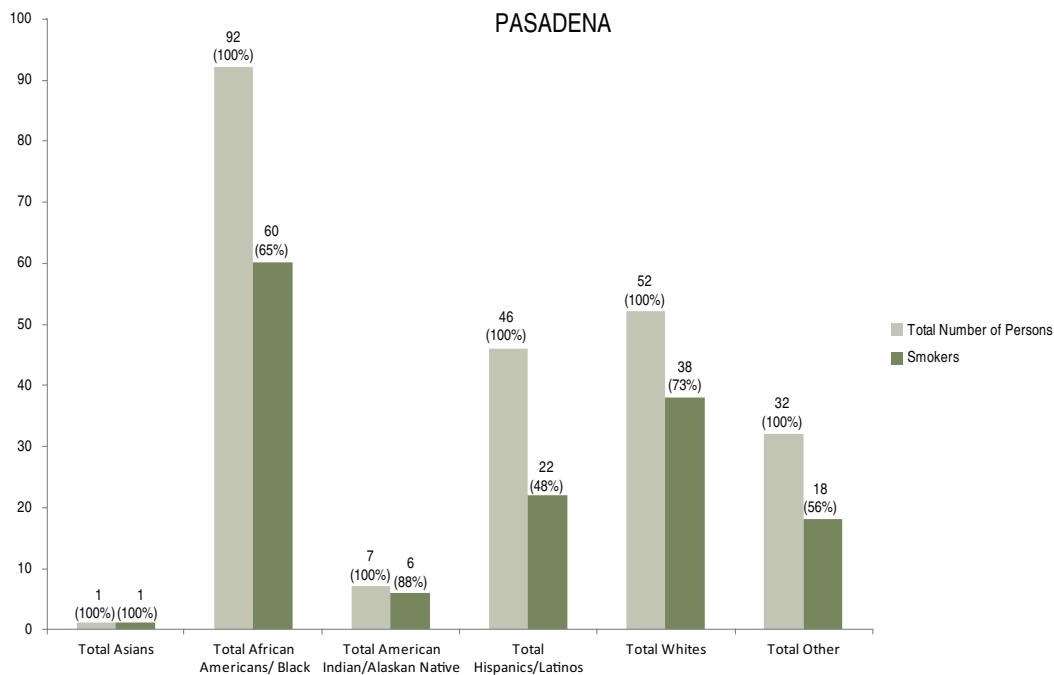
The homeless surveys were also designed to collect information about several subpopulations that included: African Americans or Blacks, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asians, chronic homeless persons, Hispanics or Latinos, men, persons with chronic health needs, persons with HIV/AIDS, persons with mental illness, seniors, substance abusers, veterans, victims of domestic violence, Whites, women, and youth ages 18 – 24.

- **Gender**



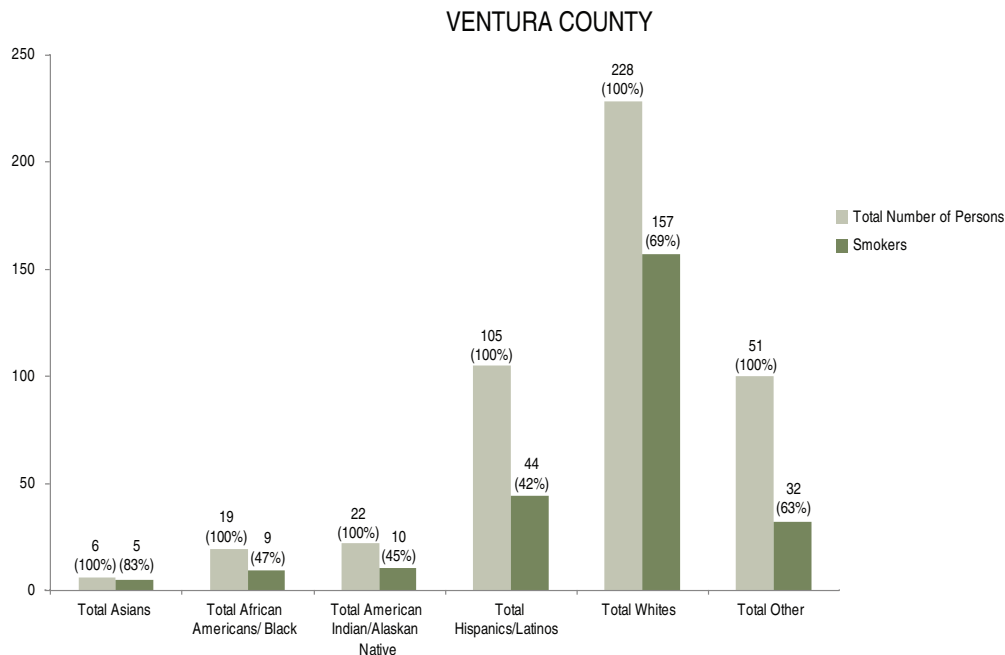
A higher percentage of men were smokers than women. More than two-thirds (69%) of Pasadena male surveyor respondents were smokers and nearly two-thirds (62%) for Ventura County. A little more than half (54%) of female surveyor respondents for Pasadena and Ventura County were smokers.

• **Ethnicity**



A higher percentage of Whites in both jurisdictions were smokers than African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos which make up the three largest ethnic groups among survey respondents. Nearly three-fourths (73%) of all Whites were smokers in Pasadena more than two-thirds (69%) in Ventura County. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of all African American/Blacks were smokers in Pasadena and nearly half (47%) in Ventura County and nearly half of Hispanics/Latinos in Pasadena (48%) and Ventura County (42%).

Others, those who did not identify themselves as more than one ethnicity, also had a high percentage of smokers. More than half of Others (56%) were smokers in Pasadena and nearly two-thirds (63%) in Ventura County. American Indian/Alaskan Natives also had a high percentage of smokers though the number of homeless persons and thus the number of survey respondents for each jurisdiction is lower when compared to the three largest ethnic groups. Of the seven American Indian/Alaskan Natives survey respondents, six or 88% were smokers and 10 of 22 or 45% were smokers in Ventura County. The number of Asian survey respondents was less than all other ethnic groups. The one Asian survey respondent in Pasadena was a smoker and five of six or (83%) in Ventura County.



The following tables provide a breakdown by gender of each of the three largest ethnic groups noted above. Table 3 shows that nearly three-fourths (71%) of White men were smokers in Pasadena and Ventura County. Two-thirds (66%) of African American/Black men were smokers in Pasadena and nearly half (46%) in Ventura County. Approximately half of Hispanic/Latino men were smokers in Pasadena (48%) and in Ventura County (44%).

**Table 3. Male Smokers by Ethnicity**

Ethnic Group	Total # of Male Survey Respondents	Pasadena	
		#	%
African American/Blacks	61	40	66
Hispanics/Latinos	31	15	48
Whites	35	25	71
		Ventura County	
		#	%
African American/Blacks	13	6	46
Hispanics/Latinos	66	29	44
Whites	163	116	71

Table 4 reveals that nearly two-thirds (65%) of African American/Black women in Pasadena were smokers and one-third (33%) in Ventura County. Nearly two-thirds of White women (63%) were smokers in Ventura County and half (50%) in Pasadena and more than one-third (38%) of Hispanic/Latinas were smokers in Ventura County and one-fourth (25%) in Pasadena.

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Total # of Female Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Pasadena</b>	
		<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
African American/Blacks	31	20	65
Hispanics/Latinos	28	7	25
Whites	26	13	50
		<b>Ventura County</b>	
		<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
African American/Blacks	9	3	33
Hispanics/Latinos	39	15	38
Whites	65	41	63

- **Persons with Disabilities and Illnesses**

***Substance Abuse***

The next table notes that more than three-fourths (80%) of substance abusers were smokers in Pasadena and a little less than three-fourths (72%) in Ventura County.

***Persons with Mental Illness***

Approximately two-thirds (68%) of persons with mental illness were smokers in Pasadena and in Ventura County.

**Table 5. Persons with Disabilities who were Smokers**

<b>PASADENA</b>			
	<b>Total # of Persons</b>	<b>Smokers</b>	
		<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Substance Abusers	46	37	80
Persons with Mental Illness	90	61	68
Chronic Homeless Persons	97	61	63
Persons with Chronic Health Needs	63	41	65
Persons with HIV/AIDS	8	4	50
<b>VENTURA COUNTY</b>			
	<b>Total # of Persons</b>	<b>Smokers</b>	
		<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Substance Abusers	139	100	72
Persons with Mental Illness	172	117	68
Chronic Homeless Persons	244	156	64
Persons with Chronic Health Needs	260	163	63
Persons with HIV/AIDS	8	3	37

***Chronic Homeless Persons<sup>4</sup>***

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of chronic homeless persons were smokers in Pasadena and nearly two-thirds (64%) in Ventura County.

***Persons with Chronic Health Needs***

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of person with chronic health needs were smokers in Pasadena and nearly two-thirds (63%) in Ventura County.

<sup>4</sup> The definition used for chronic homelessness is the same as the one used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which is “an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more OR has had at least four (4) episodes of homelessness in the past three (3) years. An episode of homelessness is a separate, distinct, and sustained stay in a place not meant for human habitation, on the streets and/or in an emergency homeless shelter. A chronically homeless person must be unaccompanied and disabled during each episode. A disabling condition is defined as ‘a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions.’ A disabling condition limits an individual’s ability to work or perform one or more activities of daily living.”

***Person with HIV/AIDS***

Half (50%) of persons with HIV/AIDS were smokers in Pasadena and more than one-third (37%) in Ventura County.

Table 6 breaks out smokers by gender for Pasadena only. More than three-fourths of substance abusers who are men (81%) and women (80%) were smokers, nearly three-fourths of men with mental illness (73%) and nearly two-thirds of women (61%) were smokers, nearly three-fourths (71%) of men who are chronically homeless and nearly half (49%) of women were smokers, and more than half (54%) of men with chronic health needs and nearly three-fourths of women were smokers. Of the six survey respondents who were men with HIV/AIDS, one-third (33%) are smokers and of the two survey respondents who were women with HIV/AIDS both (100%) stated that they were smokers.

**Table 6. Men and Women with Disabilities Who Were Smokers in Pasadena**

	Total # of Men	Men Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Substance Abusers	36	29	81
Persons with Mental Illness	49	36	73
Chronic Homeless Persons	62	44	71
Persons with Chronic Health Needs	22	12	54
Persons with HIV/AIDS	6	2	33
	Total # of Women	Women Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Substance Abusers	10	8	80
Persons with Mental Illness	41	25	61
Chronic Homeless Persons	35	17	49
Persons with Chronic Health Needs	41	29	71
Persons with HIV/AIDS	2	2	100

Table 7 breaks out smokers by gender for Ventura County only. Nearly three-fourths of substance abusers who are men (74%) and more than two-thirds (67%) of women were smokers, approximately two-thirds of men with mental illness (69%) and nearly two-thirds of women (65%) were smokers, nearly two-thirds (65%) of men who are chronically homeless and women (61%) were smokers, and nearly two-thirds (65%) of men with chronic health needs and nearly two-thirds of women were smokers. Of the three survey respondents who were men with HIV/AIDS, none (0%) were smokers and of the three survey respondents who were women with HIV/AIDS both (100%) stated that they were smokers.

**Table 7. Men and Women with Disabilities Who Were Smokers in Ventura County**

	Total # of Men	Men Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Substance Abusers	106	78	74
Persons with Mental Illness	107	74	69
Chronic Homeless Persons	166	108	65
Persons with Chronic Health Needs	174	110	63
Persons with HIV/AIDS	3	0	0

	Total # of Women	Women Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Substance Abusers	33	22	67
Persons with Mental Illness	65	42	65
Chronic Homeless Persons	78	48	61
Persons with Chronic Health Needs	85	51	60
Persons with HIV/AIDS	3	3	100

- **Age**

The two age categories noted below are youth (age 18 – 24) and seniors age 62+. Nearly three-fourths (73%) of youth (age 18 – 24) were smokers in Pasadena and Ventura County and nearly all (93%) seniors (62+) in Pasadena and more than two-thirds (68%) in Ventura County.

**Table 8. Youth (age 18 – 24) and Seniors (age 62+) who were Smokers**

<b>PASADENA</b>			
	<b>Total # of Persons</b>	<b>Smokers</b>	
		<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Youth (age 18 – 24)	22	16	73
Seniors (age 62+)	15	14	93
<b>VENTURA COUNTY</b>			
	<b>Total # of Persons</b>	<b>Smokers</b>	
		<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Youth (age 18 – 24)	34	25	73
Seniors (age 62+)	22	15	68

Table 9 breaks out smokers by gender for Pasadena only. The percentage (86%) of male youth (age 18 – 24) who were smokers was much higher than the percentage (50%) of female youth (age 18 – 24). The percentages for seniors who were smokers was high—(100%) of male seniors (age 62+) were smokers and (83%) of female seniors (age 62+).

**Table 9. Youth (age 18 – 24) and Seniors (age 62+) Who Were Smokers in Pasadena**

	<b>Total # of Men</b>	<b>Men Who Were Smokers</b>	
		<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Youth (age 18 – 24)	14	12	86
Seniors (age 62+)	9	9	100
	<b>Total # of Women</b>	<b>Women Who Were Smokers</b>	
		<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Youth (age 18 – 24)	8	4	50
Seniors (age 62+)	6	5	83

Table 10 breaks out smokers by gender for Ventura County only. The percentage (87%) of male youth (age 18 – 24) who were smokers was much higher than the percentage (45%) of female youth (age 18 – 24). More than three-fourths (79%) of male seniors (age 62+) were smokers and (33%) of female seniors (age 62+).

**Table 10. Youth (age 18 – 24) and Seniors (age 62+) Who Were Smokers in Ventura County**

	Total # of Men	Men Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Youth (age 18 – 24)	23	20	87
Seniors (age 62+)	19	15	79

	Total # of Women	Women Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Youth (age 18 – 24)	11	5	45
Seniors (age 62+)	3	1	33

Table 11 shows that nearly two-thirds (62%) of veterans in Pasadena were smokers and nearly three-fourths in Ventura County. More than half (54%) of victims of domestic violence were smokers in Pasadena and nearly two-thirds (61%) in Ventura County.

**Table 11. Veterans and Victims of Domestic Violence Who Were Smokers**

PASADENA			
	Total # of Persons	Smokers	
		#	%
Veterans	8	5	62
Victims of Domestic Violence	103	56	54

VENTURA COUNTY			
	Total # of Persons	Smokers	
		#	%
Veterans	51	38	74
Victims of Domestic Violence	188	115	61

The next table breaks out smokers by each of the subpopulations for Pasadena only. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of male veterans were smokers (there were no female veterans). More than half (58%) of male victims of domestic violence were smokers and more than half (52%) of female victims of domestic violence.

**Table 12. Veterans and Victims of Domestic Violence by Gender Who Were Smokers in Pasadena**

	Total # of Men	Men Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Veterans	8	5	62
Victims of Domestic Violence	41	24	58
	Total # of Women	Women Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Veterans	0	0	0
Victims of Domestic Violence	62	32	52

Table 13 breaks out smokers by each of the subpopulations for Ventura County only. More than three-fourths (77%) of male veterans were smokers and 33% (one of three) female veterans. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of male victims of domestic violence were smokers and nearly two-thirds (60%) of female victims of domestic violence.

**Table 13. Veterans and Victims of Domestic Violence by Gender Who Were Smokers in Ventura County**

	Total # of Men	Men Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Veterans	48	37	77
Victims of Domestic Violence	97	60	62
	Total # of Women	Women Who Were Smokers	
		#	%
Veterans	3	1	33
Victims of Domestic Violence	89	53	60

### III. Conclusion

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The purpose of the survey was to look at the prevalence of smoking in two samples of homeless persons. Data obtained from the survey is consistent with other cross-sectional studies that have looked at smoking in homeless populations, where the prevalence has been estimated to be between 60 and 70%.<sup>567</sup> In this descriptive study percentages of persons who reported smoking was presented by populations identified by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) represented in homelessness. While it is understood that in real life persons are likely to fit in more than one category, the numbers are presented as such in order to have an understanding of how smoking is distributed by type of population. After looking at the overall percentages of smokers within genders, the percentage for men was higher than for women in both jurisdictions. Not surprisingly, the percentages were also higher for smokers who had problems with substance abuse, mental illness, as well as for those who were chronic homeless persons and those who had chronic health needs. Persons who smoked reported smoking one pack of cigarettes or less per day in both jurisdictions. It should be noted that the majority of respondents smoked less than one pack per day. The data also suggests that homeless persons who smoked in the aforementioned jurisdictions by enlarge were interested in quitting smoking. The level of interest in quitting smoking varied from “somewhat interested” to “very interested.” The percentage for people who were “very interested” in quitting smoking was higher in both jurisdictions.

The results compel local programs to think about smoking cessation programs that are specifically targeted to persons who are homeless. Effective smoking cessation programs take into account a theoretical framework and specific interventions that assist the person who desires to quit smoking. Smoking cessation programs may be embedded in agencies that are already offering services to homeless persons such as case management and healthcare. Given the gamut of health-related effects associated with cigarette smoking, programs may want to consider actively approaching clients to see if they wish to quit smoking. Agencies serving the homeless may want to consider offering a comprehensive program that include cognitive-behavioral and pharmacological interventions that take into account the complexity of environmental and internal triggers, stressors among the homeless, as well as co-existing morbidities such as substance abuse and mental illness.

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5 Apollonio, D. E., & Malone, R. E. (2005). Marketing to the marginalized: Tobacco industry targeting of the homeless and mentally ill. *Tobacco Control*, 14(6), pp. 409-415; “Tobacco Use and Homelessness,” published by the National Coalition for the Homeless, July 2009.

6 Connor SE, Cook RL, Herbert MI, Neal SM, Williams, JT. (2002) Smoking Cessation in a Homeless Population: There Is a Will, but Is There a Way? *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 17, 369-372.

7 Okuyemi, K. S., Caldwell, A.R., Thomas, J. L., Born, W., Richter, K. P., Nollen, N., Braunstein, K., Ahluwalia, J.S. (2006). Homelessness and smoking cessation: Insights from focus groups. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*. 8(2) 287–296