Poor smokers and harm reduction: why smoking still makes sense

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Cheap cigarette shop, Newcastle - Image: art crimes 2010 (CC BY-NC-ND)
http://www.flickr.com/photos/artcriminal/4519058738
About me

• University of York Research Fellow (Sociology Dept); smoking cessation in working-class areas

• Cancer Research UK-funded project: e-cigarettes, health inequalities and smoking cessation

• Fieldwork in North East and North West of England, pilot fieldwork in Northern France

• No industry funding (tobacco, pharmaceutical, e-cigarette, other)
Barriers to vaping for poor smokers: problems with e-cigarettes 1

Expense

- Capital cost of starter kit
- Cost as risk = tobacco budget spent
- Easily broken, dropped, lost or stolen

Confusing information

- health effects
- addiction
- no advice from non-specialist shops and online
- variable advice in specialist shops
- how much nicotine

E-cigarette market stall, North East England – photo F Thirlway
Some stalls give excellent advice to vapers.

E-cigarette market stall, North East England – photo F Thirlway
Barriers to vaping for poor smokers: problems with electronic cigarettes 2

**Difficult to use**
- unreliability: spills, leaks, burning out the coil etc.
- fiddly: requires manual dexterity
- running out of charge
- running out of liquid
- parts not compatible
- new independent pod vapes easier BUT more expensive
Cigarette butts and e-liquid box outside Working Men’s Club, North East England – F. Thirlway

does this show the ratio of smokers to vapers...?
... but do these barriers apply to poor smokers more than to other smokers?

Confusing information? No

Difficulty of use? No

Expense? Not as much as you might think...

‘research participants bought and sold e-cigarettes, tobacco and other goods mainly through informal outlets and personal networks which are not easily captured by official figures’ (Thirlway 2016)
But what if the problem isn’t moving TO vaping, but moving AWAY FROM smoking...
Barriers to smoking for poor smokers 3: why smoking still makes sense

• Denormalisation, what denormalisation?
  = rich & poor areas: 5% versus 35% smoking prevalence

• Smoking still part of fabric of everyday life
  = memories of cigarette coupons, sponsorship etc

• Smoking cessation as betrayal of sociality
  = associated with sociality and hospitality

• Smoking cessation as pretentious
  = attention to health seen as feminized & middle-class by working-class men
Tobacco companies have not changed

Camel ad, USA 1970s (R J Reynolds)

Sampoerna ad, Indonesia 2013 (Philip Morris)
Harm reduction and poor smokers

**Smoking cessation as betrayal of sociality**
= make vaping a sociable alternative to smoking: avoid unnecessary restrictions

**Smoking cessation as pretentious**
= avoid medicalisation, emphasise pleasure, maximise variety

**Tobacco companies have not changed**
= work with the independent vape industry

Some of Adam (electrician)’s collection
Thank you


Thirlway, F. (2016) Everyday tactics in local moral worlds: e-cigarette practices in a working-class area of the UK. *Social Science & Medicine; 170*: 106-113


In memory of

Martin Pickering

Friend, research participant, bus driver
Smoked Lambert & Butler for 40 years
Died age 62

RIP