

New study suggests tobacco tax contributed to spike in robberies

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New research on the robberies of dairies for cigarettes supports the claim that the tobacco tax hikes contributed to the 2016-2017 spike in aggravated tobacco-related crime across New Zealand.

Media reports on 572 robberies between 2009 and 2018 showed dairies were the primary target, more so in lower socioeconomic areas, and disproportionately during colder months.

The paper published in the Safer Communities journal expresses concern about the high level of serious injury and trauma for shop staff incurred in the commission of the robberies.

The phenomenon was widespread across the country. Reports of robberies in Auckland were highest, followed by the Waikato and Christchurch. Nearly 60% of robberies occurred in dairies, followed by petrol station (22%), liquor stores (9%) and other types of convenience stores (5%). Tobacco was the main target.

"Frequent robberies of local stores, many including violence, should be a public health concern as destruction of community well-being can be a determinant of other health problems," said Dr Glover, Director of the Centre of Research Excellence: Indigenous Sovereignty and Smoking who conducted the study.

"August was the worst month for the crimes. This supports the argument that the price was a cause because people can least afford to smoke when other costs of living go up, as they do in winter." Said Dr Glover. "Demand for black-market tobacco will likely be highest at this time of year."

The study showed that the risk of robbery is highest on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

"The Government must acknowledge that some policies, though intended for good, sometimes have unintended negative effects, such as increasing crime. The violence, car thefts and damage to the shops can undermine a community's sense of safety." Said Dr Glover.

"There is a strong social and ethical argument for abandoning regressive policies when the negative effects of those policies deliver greater harm to people in lower income communities. The argument for a change of heart is even stronger given that there is now a highly effective alternative way to reduce the harms of smoking. That is, to support people to switch to vaping." Dr Glover said.

Source: <http://www.voxy.co.nz/national/5/391041>