



# Think Before you Judge

## The Link between Mental Illness and Smoking Cigarettes

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### Abstract

Individuals with mental illness living independently in the community engage in unhealthy lifestyle choices, such as smoking cigarettes. The purpose of this project was to explore factors that may contribute to persons with mental illness to smoke cigarettes. From the six participants that were interviewed, themes such as relaxation, stress relieve, clarity, energy and a good start to the day and social benefits emerged. The project also served as a lens into identifying barriers to quitting smoking for those with mental illness. In light of these findings, public education initiatives as well as smoking cessation programs could serve the mental health demographic by incorporating motivation, barriers and clients' needs in their intervention protocols.

### Background

About one in three people with mental illness smoke cigarettes. For psychotic conditions the rate is closer to 60%-73%. Understanding some of the factors that may contribute to smoking cigarettes, opens the opportunity to create smoking cessation programs that focus on the barriers that may prevent people with mental illness to quit smoking.

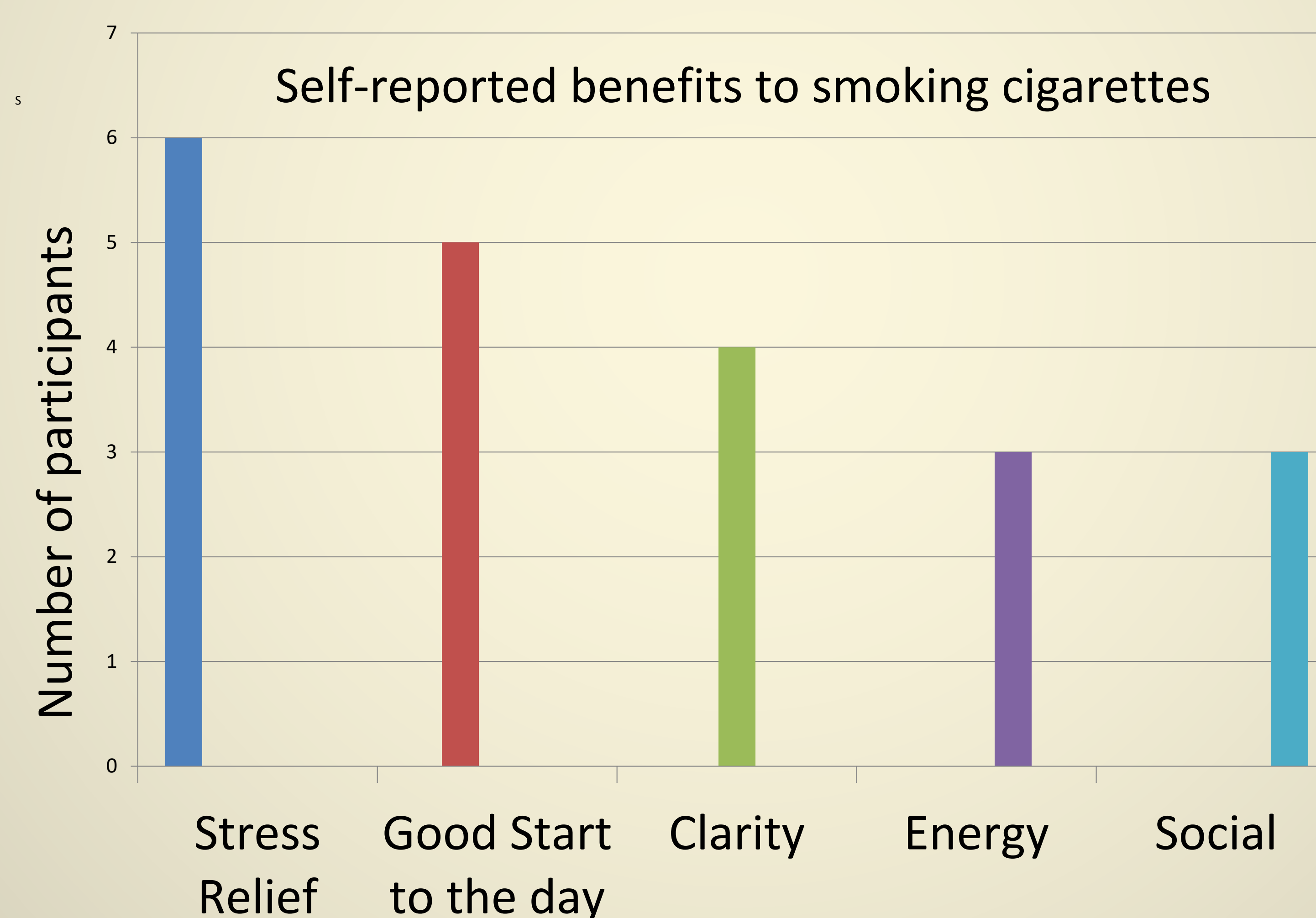
### Literature Review

- Low socio- economic status, lack of formal education and traumatic experiences, play a factor in poor decision making skills for those with mental illness.
- Smoking cigarettes provides a relief from symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Smoking cessation attempts may worsen the symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Therapeutic lifestyle changes can have an impact on weight, quality of life, and psychiatric symptoms

### Methods

- Qualitative study
- One-on one semi-structured interview
- Observations and field notes
- Transcribe app
- Recruitment through staff facilitation at workplace

### Key Finding



### Research Participants

- Four male and two female participants
- Ages ranging from 32-68 years
- All participants have a mental health diagnosis and are connected with a community mental health agency
- All participants have been chronic smokers (15-20cigs a day) for at least the last two years

*"I grew up in 13 different foster homes." interview #1*

### Discussion

- Smoking cigarettes is a means for well-being
- A combination of trauma, mental illness and instability may affect one's ability to make healthy life style choices.

*"I can't sleep at night. Smoking helps me relax and fall asleep." interview #5*

### Recommendations

- Service Providers to avoid sympathizing with the client
- Being mindful around the language we use as stigma can hinder attempts to quit smoking
- Modify smoking cessation programs by incorporating motivation, leisure counselling and wellness program

### References

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- Prochaska, J.J., Das., & Young-Wolff., K.C. (2017). Smoking, Mental Illness and Public Health. Annual Review of Public Health, 38.165-85.<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth031446>