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Combating smokeless tobacco (snus) in Finland

Harm reduction or heavy addiction
Antero Heloma

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Snus cans and sachets



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European union regulation on smokeless tobacco (snus)

- In 1992, EU adopted a directive banning a special type of smokeless tobacco product (snus)
- Finland, Sweden and Austria joined the EU in 1995
- Because of its large number of snus users Sweden was granted exemption from the snus ban
- However, Sweden should foresee that snus products are not placed on the market in other EU countries
- However, snus use has increased in Finland between 1995-2007 after the directive was enforced



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Opposition against the snus ban

- "Harm reduction" because less dangerous for health than cigarettes
- Heavy tobacco industry lobbying for snus as a "safer product"
- Even many people from the health lobby in Europe have criticised the snus ban and asked the Commission to lift the ban or revise it
- Because of the criticism the EU Commission asked a scientific committee SCENIR to evaluate effects of smokeless tobacco



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The SCENIHR report 2008

- SCENIHR – Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks
- Established and funded by European Union
- Current issue: Health Effects of Smokeless Tobacco Products

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Main findings of the SCENIHR report

- Smokeless tobacco use:
 - is associated with pancreatic and oesophageal cancer
 - increases mortality risk in myocardial infarction
 - increases risk of premature pregnancies and pre-eclampsia
 - may increase risk of metabolic syndrome and diabetes
 - causes reversible and irreversible oral lesions

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Snus and periodontal disease

- Current snus users showed an increased risk for active severe periodontal disease OR 2.1 (1.0-4.4) (Fischer et al. 2005)



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An effective carrier of nicotine

- A can of traditional Swedish-type snus delivers an amount of nicotine equal to 50-75 cigarettes
- Average snus using time is 13 hours/day per user
- Snus is heavily addictive



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Plasma nicotine levels in smokers and smokeless tobacco users

Tobacco user group	Plasma nicotine (ng/ml)
Swedish smokers	36.7
Swedish snus users	36.6
British smokers	36.7
British nasal snuffers	36.1

(Vainio & Weiderpass 2003)

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Boys' snus use by age in Finland

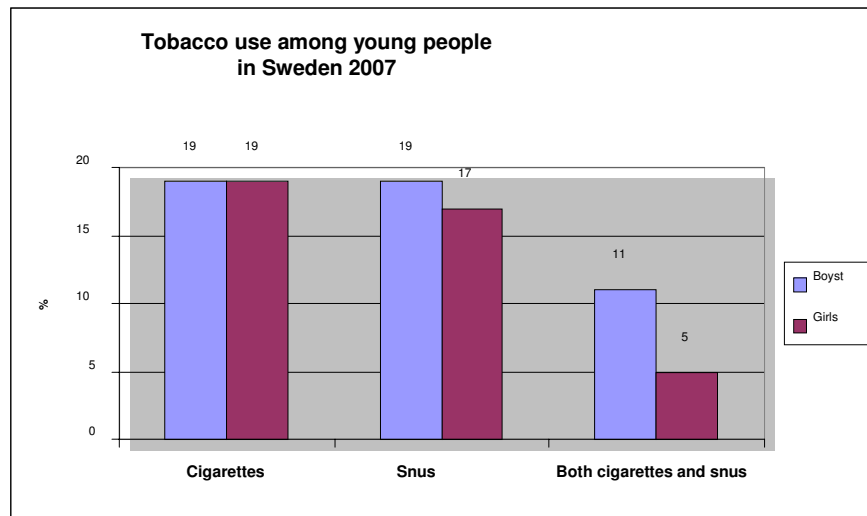


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Snus and binge drinking

- Heavy alcohol use and binge drinking are associated with snus use among adolescents even more than with smoking (Wickholm et al. 2003)



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Snus is neither a harm-reduction nor smoking cessation product – Why?

- Less than 5% of Swedish men have stopped smoking due to starting using snus
- Women have the same quit rates as men who use snus
- 40% of snus users start smoking
- 4 out of 10 both smoke and use snus
- There is no longitudinal survey that could in single cases show the effect of snus in smoking cessation
- Snus causes similar or even stronger nicotine addiction than cigarettes



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Why the European Union must maintain its snus ban

- If the EU snus ban is lifted heavy marketing of snus to women and young people will start in European countries
- Snus is not a traditional tobacco product in Finland but a new product aggressively marketed in ferries sailing between Finland and Sweden
- Even though snus may be less harmful than cigarettes there is no argument for sale and marketing a harmful and addictive tobacco product particularly to young people
- In Sweden the tobacco companies have recently brought to market snus cans designed for women and young girls



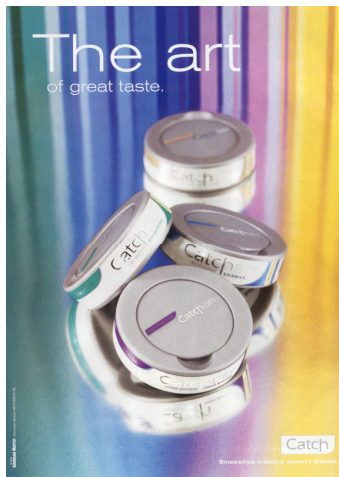
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Women – a new target group for snus



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Targeting women



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Snus is now marketed all over the world

- There is an increasing trend of product development by the tobacco industry to bring new tobacco products into the market in developed countries where smoking is in the decline and smoke-free areas increase
- Marketing of snus has also started in developing countries where it is a completely new tobacco product

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Swedish snus cans sold in Zimbabwe



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Swedish-type snus marketed for Africans

- The tobacco company says:
 - **"These [snus sachets] can be used in conjunction with smoking, as a tool to quit smoking OR as an alternative to smoking where smoking is not permitted."**

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Chief of Swedish Match Tobacco Company

- Commenting about jointly selling snus world-wide with Philip Morris:
 - **"This can be a very interesting proposition for Asia, and possibly parts of Africa"**
 - **"This is a long-term commitment. We will not do it overnight"**

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Proposition of a working group on Tobacco Control appointed by Finnish health ministry

- The working group gave its final report to the Minister of Health in December 2008 with the following propositions:
 - **Finland should enforce a complete ban on the import of snus including import for private use**

Other propositions

- Ban on visible display of tobacco products in all shops
- Ban on smoking in all cars (even private) if children are present
- A maximum of 10% of any hotel rooms can be reserved for smokers
- Heavier penalties for selling tobacco to minors (up to 1 year 6 months in prison)

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Snus – not an alternative to NRT

- Snus
 - is a stimulant designed for pleasure
 - is marketed to young people to obtain more users
 - is often more addictive than smoking
- NRT
 - is intended as a medical cessation therapy for a limited time
 - has less addiction potential than smoking due to slower release of nicotine
 - is never marketed to obtain new addicts

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Traditional Nicotine Replacement Therapy

- is to be preferred to snus
- acts as a complement to smoking cessation, advice and support
- should be affordable and easily accessible

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Thank you!



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