

Smoking prevalence among South African adults (aged 15 years and over) increased from **19%** in 2017 to **24%** in 2021 (GATS,2021).

Smoking prevalence was markedly higher among men (**39%**) relative to women (**10%**) in 2021 (GATS, 2021).

Gender

Cigarette smoking is significantly more prevalent among men than women in South Africa.

39.1% of South African men (about 8.2 million people) and 9.7% of women (about 2.2 million) aged 15 years and over smoked cigarettes in 2021 (GATS, 2021).

Gender	Prevalence (%)
Overall	23.9%
Female	9.7%
Male	39.1%

Gender and Age

The smoking prevalence for men and women generally increases with age.

In 2021, 36.9% of male youth aged 15-24 years, 41.7% of men aged 25-44 years, and 47.4% of men aged 45-64 years smoked. Smoking prevalence among elderly men (64+ years) was somewhat lower, with a prevalence of 32.0% (GATS, 2021).

A similar trend was evident for women. In 2021, 10.7% of female youth, 11.5% of women aged 25-44 years, 12.6% of women aged 45-64 years, and 11.0% of women over 65 years smoked cigarettes (GATS, 2021).

Age Group	Male (%)	Female (%)
15-24	36.9%	10.7%
25-44	41.7%	11.5%
45-64	47.4%	12.6%
65+	32.0%	11.0%

Age

Middle-aged people are the most likely to smoke tobacco, compared to the youth and elderly.

Tobacco smoking prevalence (which included manufactured cigarettes and roll-your-own) was highest among middle-aged people: 25-44-year-olds (26.7%) and 45-64-year-olds (28.6%) (GATS, 2021).

Age Group	Prevalence (%)
15-24	23.9%
25-44	26.7%
45-64	28.6%
65+	18.9%

Timeline

Tobacco smoking prevalence among people over 35 declined from 25.0% in 1998 (40.5% in males, 10.9% in females) to 19.4% in 2022 (31.9% in males, 7.9% in females), but plateaued after 2010 (Groenewald et al, 2022).

Estimates suggest that some of the reductions in smoking prevalence have eroded in recent years, with overall prevalence increasing to 23.9% in 2021 (GATS, 2021).