



UCT KNOWLEDGE CO-OP

Knowledge, Perceptions and Attitudes of Young Adults Toward Electronic-Cigarettes

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Background

- Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), commonly known in South Africa by the brand name 'Twisp', are devices that resemble traditional cigarettes.
- They function through the heating of liquid to produce aerosol or vapour that is inhaled and expelled. (Grana et al: 2014).
- A typical e-cigarette is comprised of a pipe, electronic heating element and liquid container.
- Inside the container is a liquid mixture that typically contains nicotine, distilled water, flavourings and propylene glycol and/or vegetable glycerine. (Foulds et al: 2011)

Diversity of e-cigarette devices



Background (continued)

- Studies have found that e-cigarettes do not contain a number of toxicants and carcinogens that are present in tobacco cigarettes. (Britton & Bogdanovica: 2014)
- There has been a rapid market penetration of e-cigarettes worldwide as these products are being marketed as a healthier alternative to smoking or an aid to smoking cessation. (Padon: 2018, Granna & Ling: 2014)
- South Africa has no legislation which specifically controls the marketing, sale and use of e-cigarettes.
- Concerns have been raised over the increasing use of e-cigarettes by the youth (USDHHS: 2016), who are often attracted to these novel products and specifically targeted by industry.

Aim & Methodology of the study

Aim: To explore young adults' perceptions, knowledge and behaviors relating to e-cigarette use and how these are shaped.

Study design: Exploratory qualitative approach.

Study population and settings:UCT students from 18 to 25 years of age. Both e-cigarette users and non-users were included in the study.

Data collection and Analysis

- 8 in-depth interviews with e-cigarette users were conducted.
- 5 focus group discussions were conducted.
- Thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the findings.

Participant Characteristics (n=57)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Participant's age		
18-19	19	33%
20-21	13	23%
22-23	14	25%
24-25	11	19%
Participant's sex		
Female (users)	26 (9)	46% (34.6%)
Male (users)	31 (15)	54% (48.4%)
Participant's race		
Black	14	25%
White	15	26%
Mixed race	20	35%
Other	2	4%
E-cigarette use status		
Ever use (<i>dual use</i>)	24 (16)	42% (67%)
Never use	33	58%

Results

E-cigarettes as “healthy”

These things are safe and a lot of people don't know that. They see you vaping, and they say “hey why are you doing that, just do the real thing...” It's kind of like wearing a helmet when you cycle. You know people be like “ha ha, look you're such a little bitch wearing a helmet” when actually you're just being safe. (19-year old male, user)

I know they are slightly bad for you but they're still like roughly 95% healthier than real cigarettes. I know that they are not like 100% good for me but I know that everyone also eats sugar and sugar is also terrible for you. So, I decided it's not that bad. (20-year old male, user)

Chemical constituents of e-cigarettes

- Participants had limited knowledge of the chemical constituents of e-cigarettes.
- While some participants pointed out nicotine and flavours as the only constituents that they knew, others indicated that such information is not always available to them.
- 'Pleasant smell', 'cleanliness' and 'environmental friendliness' were seen as indications that e-cigarettes are healthier.

Factors influencing e-cigarette use

Although e-cigarettes were perceived as “healthy”, the majority of participants indicated that they started using e-cigarettes for reasons that are not health-related.

The most cited reasons for use were;

- Curiosity
- Social acceptability
- Flavours and pleasant smell

Experiences

Exposure to e-cigarettes as minors

- Almost all current and previous e-cigarette users in this study first learnt about e-cigarettes when they were still in high school and below the age of 18.
- Lack of clear warnings and age restriction on the devices has been interpreted to mean that e-cigarettes are okay for minors.

Circumventing smoking restrictions

- E-cigarettes can be used in areas where smoking is prohibited such as public places and inside buildings.

Experiences (continued)

Smoking cessation

- Participants questioned the efficacy of e-cigarettes in smoking cessation, citing examples from their first-hand experience.
- Some participants have turned into dual users instead of quitting smoking

Second-hand and counterfeit products

- Due to higher costs of e-cigarettes, some people buy second-hand devices from other individuals or online.
- Some participants reported making their own flavours and selling them.
- The safety of the ingredients used in making those flavours is not known.

Conclusion

The study raises further questions and directs areas for further research:

- The extent to which e-cigarettes promote tobacco use or dual-use remains unknown.
- Further research should also focus on the regulatory and public health challenges of second-hand and counterfeit e-cigarette marketing and use in South Africa.

Recommendations

- For precautionary reasons, the marketing, sale and use of e-cigarettes should be regulated under the Tobacco Products Control Act.
 - #Classifying e-cigarettes as tobacco-related products will not only help to reduce the use of e-cigarettes in areas where smoking is prohibited and reduce e-cigarette use by minors but may also alter the perception that these products are safe
- Increase e-cigarette awareness especially through utilizing platforms such as social media where young people access information.
- E-cigarette education and information should also be provided in schools to avoid situations where young people start using these products without knowing the potential risks and challenges.

References

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