E-Cigarette Initiation and Discontinuation: A Qualitative Study
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INTRODUCTION

- Decreasing addiction to nicotine among adolescents and young adults is an important public health goal.
- Increasing popularity of electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) use among adolescents and young adults may hamper this effort because tobacco use behaviors are still developing and the role of e-cigarette on nicotine addiction is unknown.
- Given the novelty of e-cigarette use, examining factors that promote initiation and deter continued use among adolescents and young adults may inform tobacco prevention efforts.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study was to examine high school and young adults’ reasons for initiating and for discontinuing e-cigarette use.

METHODS

Study Design:
- 18 focus groups, with 6-8 participants in each group were conducted in 2 colleges (n=59 students), 2 high schools (n=52) and 2 middle schools (n=16) in New Haven County, CT.
- College and high school groups were stratified by gender and cigarette smoking status and middle school groups by gender only.

Participant Gender by Age Group and Smoking Status

- A standard focus group guide was used to ask participants about their knowledge of e-cigarettes and reasons for use and non-use.

Data Analysis:
- Focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and examined using framework analysis technique by coding for a priori concepts and emergent themes.
- Preliminary data is presented as data analysis is ongoing.

RESULTS

REASONS FOR E-CIGARETTE INITIATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Students</th>
<th>High School Students</th>
<th>Middle School Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavors</td>
<td>Flavors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends and family</td>
<td>Friends and family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To quit smoking</td>
<td>To quit smoking</td>
<td>Sign of independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool</td>
<td>Availability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience (indoors, at parties)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REASONS FOR E-CIGARETTE DISCONTINUATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smokers</th>
<th>Non-Smokers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not as satisfying as cigarettes</td>
<td>College &amp; High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“weird,” “stupid” “did not like it”</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once the novelty wore off was not interested anymore</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

- Regardless of age and smoking status, the most common themes for e-cigarette initiation were curiosity and availability of flavors.
- Among high school and college students, the influence of friends and family and using it to quit smoking were common reasons to initiate.
- Other factors influencing the initiation of e-cigarettes were age specific:
  - College students perceived it as being “cool”
  - High school students were more likely to try it because of wide availability
  - Middle school students perceived it as a sign of maturity/independence

- The reasons for discontinuation of e-cigarettes differed between smokers and non-smokers.
- Smokers who discontinued e-cigarettes did not find it as satisfying as real cigarettes
- Non-smokers lost interest once e-cigarettes lost its novelty

CLINICAL APPLICATION

- Regulation of flavors in e-cigarettes may reduce its appeal to young people
- Prevention methods could focus on educating both youth and their family (i.e., parents) about the potential harm of nicotine use
- In order to implement prevention education and policy changes regarding the use of e-cigarettes, more research is needed to determine the role of e-cigarettes in addiction in youth and its effect on smoking cessation.