

New research backs FDA ban on flavored cigarettes

December 15 2009

New research showing that thrill-seeking teenagers are especially susceptible to fruit-flavored cigarettes is in line with the recent ban on the sale of flavored cigarettes by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in September 2009. According to the FDA, the ban, authorized by the new Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, is part of a national effort by the FDA to reduce smoking, which is the leading preventable cause of death in America.

"We found that those teens who gravitate toward novel experiences were especially drawn to cigarettes described as having an appealing, sweet flavor, such as cherry," says lead author Kenneth Manning with Colorado State University.

The study, published in the December issue of the journal *Tobacco Control*, was funded by the Substance Abuse Policy Research Program (SAPRP) of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Past research has found that high-sensation-seeking youth are more likely to smoke cigarettes than their low-sensation-seeking peers, Manning notes. But until now, no studies have looked at how novel, sweet-tasting cigarettes might impact this group of thrill seekers. The authors proposed that the influence of cigarette flavor descriptors lies in their ability to alter the "arousal potential" of a cigarette brand's marketing communications (such as its packaging). Arousal potential refers to the degree to which a stimulus (like the description of a cigarette's flavor) is capable of gaining attention and exciting the nervous

system.

To test this theory, the researchers divided 253 high school students into two groups to evaluate three pictures of cigarette packages: Camel, American Spirit, and a fictitious brand, "Onyx". The first group viewed packages that included traditional cigarette descriptions such as "domestic blend," and the second group of teens viewed packages with the cigarettes described as "cherry." Following exposure to each package, the study participants responded to several questions regarding the appeal of the brand (i.e., beliefs about how enjoyable it would be, overall evaluation, and trial intention).

To determine their sensation-seeking tendencies, the students responded to measures such as "I would like to explore strange places" and "I like friends who are exciting and unpredictable".

Sensation-seeking varies over a continuum, explains Manning. "In our study, we essentially divided half of the students into the high group and the other half into the low group based on their overall sensation-seeking scores."

Results indicated that the appeal of the brands across the belief, attitude, and trial intention measures depended on both the sensation-seeking tendency of the student and whether the student had viewed the brand packages with the traditional or sweet flavor descriptions. In particular, among students who were classified as high-sensation seekers, the cigarette brands were significantly more appealing to those exposed to the packages that included the sweet flavor descriptors than to those who had viewed the packages with the traditional descriptions.

This underscores a key point of the FDA ban—that flavors make cigarettes and other tobacco products more appealing to youth, and are created to attract and allure kids into lifelong addiction. "By enhancing

the arousal potential associated with tobacco brands, sweet flavor descriptors boost the appeal of these products among high-sensation seekers," the authors conclude.

More information: Parents and consumers can learn more about the risks of flavored tobacco products at www.fda.gov/TobaccoProducts/Guidance/ucm183196.htm

Provided by Substance Abuse Policy Research Program

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