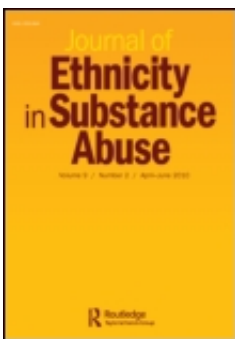# Study explores the social norms of electronic cigarette use by teenagers

August 26 2014

"The Social Norms and Beliefs of Teenage Male Electronic Cigarette Use," a research study published in Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse (Routledge), delves into the social norms and beliefs of teenage male electronic cigarette users. Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are battery operated inhalation devices that provide warm, vaporized nicotine to users without the inconvenience of tobacco smoke. Often marketed as a "healthier alternative," e-cigarettes have filled shelves of convenience stores and have been used much more frequently in public spaces since their inception in late 2011.

"Much of our past research has been conducted on tobacco use among disparate populations, in particular African American males," said Dr. Ronald Peters and Dr. Angela Meshack in a joint statement. "The

present research is an extension of our previous work and began after getting anecdotal evidence from students with whom we work. They shared that they were beginning to use electronic cigarettes because they were novel and had high social approval among their peers."

To conduct the research, a sample of 47 males ages 15-17 years participated in focus groups. They were identified as "e-cigarette users" based upon their responses to a question that asked if they had used an e-cigarette in the previous 30 days. Four open-ended questions were asked to identify participants' subjective norms and beliefs related to e-cigarette use: (a) Why do youth use electronic cigarettes?; (b) Where are places that you use electronic cigarettes?; (c) What do your friends think about electronic cigarettes?; and (d) Why are electronic cigarettes so popular?

The focus groups identified several norms about teenage e-cigarette use among African American males. The primary reasons these teens admitted to using e-cigarettes were expeditious consumption and easy concealment, high social approval among peers, beliefs that e-cigarettes are healthier as well as more aesthetically pleasing compared to tobacco cigarettes, and a safe high. The researchers quote one respondent's belief in the results section, "It is healthier than smoking a cigarette because cigarettes got all those chemicals in the [expletive]." Another participant mentioned his reason for using, "Because you can hit it and put it in your pocket quick and not be caught. If there are no teachers around, you don't have to take the time to light it up." Participants admitted using their e-cigarettes everywhere – both at school and at home.

"The data uncovered in this research offer potential directions for larger qualitative and quantitative research studies related to e-cigarette use among youth," explained the researchers. "We hope with future research to determine if e-cigarette use may serve as a gateway to other drugs just as traditional tobacco cigarettes have been identified and if the user

experiences higher euphoric effects."

**More information:** "The Social Norms and Beliefs of Teenage Male Electronic Cigarette Use," Ronald J. Peters, Angela Meshack, Mi-Ting Lin, Mandy Hill, Susan Abughosh, *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*, Vol. 12, Iss. 4, 2013, DOI: 10.1080/15332640.2013.819310

Provided by Taylor & Francis