

Young people do not associate e-cigarettes with increased likelihood of smoking

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New peer-reviewed research published today in *Drugs Education Prevention and Policy* shows that e-cigarettes are not increasing the likelihood of tobacco consumption and may in fact be contributing to

negative perceptions about smoking among young people.

The study, based on semi-structured interviews with 50 vapers between the ages of 16 and 26 - including 28 current smokers, 19 former smokers and 3 never smokers—found the majority of [young people](#) think e-cigarettes are a substantially less harmful alternative to combustible [tobacco](#) and don't believe that vaping is increasing their likelihood of [smoking](#).

"What is interesting about our research is that the availability of vaping products might be contributing to even worse perceptions of tobacco in this age group," said Dr. Neil McKeganey, Director of the Centre for Substance Use Research (CSUR) and lead author of the study. "Young people are rationalizing that, because a much less harmful alternative exists, then logically it makes even less sense to consume tobacco."

While the visual similarity between tobacco cigarettes and vaping products has given rise to concerns that e-cigarettes may "renormalise" smoking, it remains unclear exactly what is meant by a process of "smoking renormalisation" or indeed how the use of e-cigarettes can be specifically attributed to it.

"What we know is that all vapers are overwhelmingly current and former smokers," said McKeganey. "We also know that as e-cigarette devices have evolved, vaping and smoking have become visually quite distinctive from one another. While some young people we interviewed drew obvious comparisons between the two—namely, inhalation and nicotine consumption—it is clear that, for the most part, they perceive e-cigarettes as vastly different from smoking. More importantly, there was overwhelming consensus amongst our participants that vaping is not making smoking more socially acceptable and that, if anything, it is making cigarettes seem even less acceptable."

This research supports the conclusions of other studies that have failed to find any demonstrable link between e-cigarette use and increased likelihood of tobacco consumption. In the UK, where nearly 3 million people are currently vaping, smoking rates continue to fall and according to Action on Smoking and Health only 2 percent of vapers are never-smokers.

"What our research shows is that young people clearly perceive e-cigarettes for what they are - a less harmful alternative to tobacco. Equally, though, this view does not, as one might assume, directly translate into 'risk-free' in their minds. To the contrary, some interviewees said they were concerned that e-cigarettes might be associated with unknown risks over the longer term, which also tells us that young people are experimenting with a certain degree of caution."

"Regulators need to fully recognise the context in which young people are trying and using e-cigarettes and our research does not support alarmist views that vaping will suddenly undo or reverse decades of successful tobacco control. With this in mind, any concerns about youth experimentation must be balanced against the growing body of evidence that demonstrates the increasingly obvious link between [e-cigarettes](#) and smoking cessation across the population as a whole."

More information: Neil McKeganey et al, Vapers and vaping: E-cigarettes users views of vaping and smoking, *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/09687637.2017.1296933](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687637.2017.1296933)

Provided by Centre for Substance Use and Research (CSUR, Glasgow)

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