

Disadvantaged former smokers are more likely to use e-cigarettes to quit

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People from lower socioeconomic groups in England have higher rates of e-cigarette use compared with more affluent groups among those who have quit smoking, according to a new UCL-led study.

The study, published today in *JAMA Network Open* and funded by

Cancer Research UK (CRUK), analysed data from 34,442 people aged 16 and over who had formerly smoked.

The research team set out to find whether socio-economic position was associated with long-term ex-smokers use of e-cigarettes and whether the use changed over time. Long-term ex-smokers were defined as those who had given up smoking for more than one year.

They found that [e-cigarette use](#) increased from 3.3% in 2014 to 10.4% in 2019 for all long-term ex-smokers, but was around 60% more likely among those from disadvantaged groups. In 2019, 13.5% of those in lower socio-economic groups reported using e-cigarettes compared to 8.2% in more affluent groups.

The research team also found that it was rare for people to take up e-cigarettes after they had quit smoking. For example, of those who had quit smoking before 2011, only 0.8% in 2014 and 2.1% in 2019 reported using e-cigarettes. In this subgroup, there was no evidence of a link between socio-[economic status](#) and e-cigarette use.

Lead author, Ph.D. candidate, Loren Kock (UCL Epidemiology & Health Care) explained: "Our previous research has shown that the use of e-cigarettes during a quit attempt is similar across different socioeconomic groups. However, this new work highlights that there is a difference in use by long-term ex-smokers.

"Our results suggest that more affluent ex-smokers are using e-cigarettes during a smoking quit attempt before discontinuing their use. In contrast, a greater proportion of ex-smokers in lower socio-economic groups may continue to use e-cigarettes following their smoking quit attempt.

"Socio-economically disadvantaged smokers are thought to be more dependent on nicotine, due to generally taking up smoking at a younger

age and smoking more cigarettes per day and such dependence might encourage greater use of e-cigarettes following quitting for pleasure, to satisfy cravings and potentially prevent relapse to smoking."

Co-author Professor Jamie Brown (UCL Epidemiology & Health Care and Co-Director of the UCL Tobacco and Alcohol Research Group) added: "We know e-cigarettes help people to quit smoking and are much less harmful than cigarettes. However further research is needed to understand the consequences of longer-term use by former smokers, particularly whether [e-cigarette](#) smoking affects a later return to cigarette [smoking](#)."

More information: Loren Kock et al. Association of Socioeconomic Position With e-Cigarette Use Among Individuals Who Quit Smoking in England, 2014 to 2019, *JAMA Network Open* (2020). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.4207](#)

Provided by University College London

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