

# Study shows how personal stories of health risks got students to stop vaping

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Babac Salmani, a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Health Sciences, studied the intention and behaviour change of regular vapers after they watched a short video explaining the potential health risks. Credit: Chris Kindratsky/Western Communications

A new Western study shows that university students who were regularly vaping wanted to cut back after learning about the threat the habit could pose to their health.

Ph.D. candidate Babac Salmani and Faculty of Health Sciences professor Harry Prapavessis have published a paper in the *Journal of Health Psychology* showing vaping [intentions](#)—and, to a lesser degree, the behavior itself—can be reduced after learning about the potential consequences.

Undergraduate students in the study, most of them vaping anywhere from once a week to every day, changed their intentions after watching an eight-minute video, the study showed. The short film features [health](#) care professionals and people who used to vape talking about current research and the risks. The [control group](#) for the study watched a video about nutrition instead

"I am excited about this research because it shows our new technique has the potential to make a significant impact in the field of health promotion," Salmani said of the results.

"Immediately after watching the intervention, they're like 'I want to stop.' What's really important to us is the consistency in that intention—it maintained a level of strength in terms of people wanting to stop vaping."

Those feelings remained strong over the course of a 45-day study period, including three follow-up sessions when participants were asked to report how they felt about the perceived severity and vulnerability of the threats posed by vaping through a series of questions. Those are two factors that are believed to drive motivation to protect oneself from danger.

"If we were to provide this info, this way—with personal accounts by students or by individuals that are the same age—we'll be able to have an effect on the intentions of this young adult population, and hopefully, with future research, have an impact on behavior as well," Salmani said.

Vaping is popular among [young people](#), with Statistics Canada reporting 29% of Canadians aged 15 to 19 and roughly half of those between 20 and 24 have tried it. Seventeen percent of the older group were current vapers, according to 2021 data.

Participants in the Western study, whose average age was 22 years, identified themselves as regular vapers, meaning they used e-cigarettes at least three times in the month prior. Most vaped between five to fifteen days a month. Undergraduate students from 23 universities across six provinces participated in the study.

Though their intentions were significantly altered after learning about possible health effects, the video "intervention" wasn't associated with the same reduction in vaping. Even if they wanted to stop or reduce vaping, use was up and down over the course of the study, though it did drop overall. This drop favored the intervention group, only towards the end of the study.

Curbing vaping remains the ultimate goal, Salmani said. "If you have intentions, that's great, but if you're not creating behavior change, what's the point?"

He believes future research definitively showing improved health from quitting or reducing [vaping](#)—the same correlation documented for smoking—will help push young people to stop.

"It's that same pattern of misunderstanding or misconception of the product that I believe will end up following the same linear path as cigarettes have, over the next 30 years," Salmani said.

The results showing intention are also meaningful because they underline a successful strategy to reach young people engaged in harmful behaviors, Salmani said. He hopes the same model, using a health

psychology structure called protection motivation theory, will be repeated in studies and programs to deter other harmful habits.

"Hopefully the provincial and [federal governments](#) or health agencies are able to implement these types of intervention in schools and clinics or community centers so people understand what the effects of these behaviors are," he said.

"That can influence people to abandon these types of behaviors because they are so harmful to health and because they can be so addictive, as well."

**More information:** Babac Salmani et al, Using a protection motivation theory framework to reduce vaping intention and behaviour in Canadian university students who regularly vape: A randomized controlled trial, *Journal of Health Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/13591053221144977](#)

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