



Risk Behaviors of Generation Z: Electronic Cigarette Use in Males

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BACKGROUND

- **Generation Z:** people born between 1995-2010
- The trending rise in popularity of **electronic cigarettes** warrants further investigation into the nature of this behavior. It is estimated almost 1/5 of 12th graders report using e-cigarettes.¹
- The college years are often a **stressful time of transition** for many students, and the establishment of **independent lifestyle skills and behaviors** is key.
- Data trends suggest that **lifestyle behaviors developed in college** and young adulthood commonly **carry over into adulthood.**²
- The primary reason reported for electronic cigarette usage was **“safer than cigarettes”**³

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to identify **unique aspects of risky health behaviors** in Generation Z college students. For this project, the authors specifically explored **electronic cigarette use** and its implications for nursing and health care.

METHODS

A **qualitative phenomenological research design** was utilized for this project.

Study population included a **purposive sample** of Generation Z students.

Individual interviews were conducted with study participants to explore attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge surrounding use and/or consequences of use related to electronic cigarettes.

- A total of **8 private interviews** (4 with e-cigarette smokers; 4 with non-smokers entirely) were conducted and transcribed for data analysis.

Data was analyzed using Colaizzi’s (1978) seven-step method for qualitative data analysis.

FINDINGS

A lack of understanding of e-cigarettes exists, both within e-cigarette smokers and non-smokers.

- Participants described greater uncertainty regarding the actual contents of e-cigarettes, whereas they felt more certain about the concrete nature of JUUL products.

Both e-cigarette smoker and non-smoker participants perceive the main association of nicotine as “addiction.”

- When e-cigarette smoker participants were asked about their rationale for continued use, the main themes of “boredom” and “relaxation” emerged. When non-smoker participants were asked to speculate a rationale for continued use, themes of “peer-pressure” or feeling “cool” emerged.

Nicotine can cause appetite reduction as well as lower insulin levels.

- The diet of participants included mostly of “fast-food” and “snacks”
- Report of skipping meals was low

The media and advertising industries may serve as the primary catalyst for the rise of popularity of JUUL in recent years.

- E-cigarette smoker participants explained the popularity of such products as being more “portable” and “easier to hide” than traditional cigarettes.
- Parental discontent of e-cigarettes and its usage was almost unanimous among all participants.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Nicotine is a known chemical that increases alertness and concentration; a primary indication for e-cigarette usage among study participants included an increased predisposition to boredom and apathy.

The media and advertising industries – coupled with the discrete and portable nature of e-cigarette product design – create a psychosocial target for use and popularity among adolescent and young adults.

A lack of knowledge drives continual use of e-cigarette products, and the switch to traditional cigarettes is likely for users.

A complete nursing assessment of Gen Z individuals should include assessment for E-cigarette use a health behavior unique to this emerging adult population that has potential to shape their healthcare needs of the future.

References

¹ National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2016) Teens and E-Cigarettes. Retrieved from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/teens-e-cigarettes>

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³ Kenne, D. R., Fischbein, R. L., Tan, A. S. L., & Banks, M. (2017). The use of substances other than nicotine in electronic cigarettes among college students. *Substance Abuse: Research & Treatment, (11)*, 1–8. doi: [10.1177/1178221817733736](https://doi.org/10.1177/1178221817733736)