

“IT’S THE FIRST THING YOU THINK ABOUT WHEN YOU WAKE UP, AND IT’S THE LAST THING YOU THINK ABOUT WHEN YOU GO TO SLEEP”

Nicotine vaping among New Zealand adolescents

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AIM:

To understand adolescents’ vaping-related views and experiences, so that public policy and debate is informed by youth perspectives.

METHOD:

Qualitative design using thematic analysis. Interviewed 64 students aged 14-17 years, June-Oct 2022. School purposively selected for socioeconomic and ethnic diversity, Wellington region, NZ.

FINDINGS:

Non-vaping was an active choice

Over half had never vaped, despite opportunities to do so. Reasons for vaping refusal included:



Vaping was inconsistent with their values, upbringing, beliefs or parents’ expectations



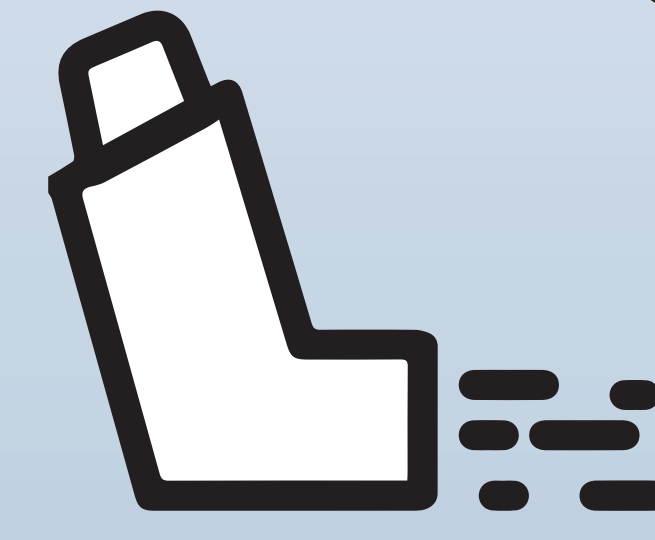
Vaping was seen as “pointless.” No benefits, waste of money



Vaping was seen as incompatible with their goals e.g. sporting performance



Concerns about becoming addicted; slippery slope to other addictions



Existing health issues (e.g. asthma) or concerns about long term health impacts of vaping

I just wanna have, like, good lungs and stuff because I’m a really sporty person.

(Ariana, F, Māori, 14 years)

(Tiffany, Pasifika, F, 15 years)

Reasons to try vaping initially

- Only one out of 27 who had tried vaping did so to quit cigarettes
- Curiosity, fitting in were common reasons
- Flavours and tricks were enticing

[Someone] pulls out a vape and you just kind of wanna hit it just once ‘cause, like, it smells like fun

(Smith, F, Other European, 14 years)

Reasons for ongoing vaping

- Occasional use (N=3): Social advantages, e.g. fitting in, conversation starter
- Daily use (N=10): nicotine addiction, coping mechanism for managing stress/distress

It’s just like if I’m stressed out, or if I’m having a bad time. I like to think about it as a reset because it just resets your mood completely. It calms you down

Jay, M, NZ Euro, 17 years

I guess, it helps me not self-harm. It kind of just distracts me from the other things that I could be doing

(Abby, F, Pasifika, 16 years)

Impacts of daily vaping

- Vaping had become an all-consuming focus for some, distracting from other goals.
- Many felt trapped and “embarrassed” about becoming addicted, affecting their self-esteem and agency.

It’s, like, the first thing you think about when you wake up, and it’s the last thing you think about when you go to sleep. [...] In class, toilets, while I’m walking to class, anywhere I have the chance, I do it.

(Riley, Māori, F, 15 years)

I was like, ‘I can stop when I want to.’ But now it’s like, damn, [I’ve been vaping for] 4 years

(Abby, F, Pasifika, 16 years)

You don’t really want to go to a bathroom that you know is going to be full of people hanging out and vaping

(Olivia, F, NZ Euro, 15 years)

Vaping also had impacts on the wider school community e.g. bathroom space, litter.

- Most students who vaped daily reported negative impacts e.g. on their fitness and finances.

I know how many [I’ve used] ‘cause I collected the pods. It’s from year 11 till now [18 months], probably like over 200, so \$2000.

(Jess, Pasifika, F, 16 years)

...like, the breathing sometimes, when I’m walking up that hill – it gets me, and I look around and everyone else is fine, and I’m like [takes a deep breath] [...] I’m hella puffed out

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Daily nicotine vaping often has immediate negative impacts on adolescents, including rapid nicotine dependence. Many vaped to cope with stress/distress, suggesting those with pre-existing vulnerabilities may be disproportionately affected by vaping-related harm, including exacerbation of mental health issues. New Zealand needs stronger measures to protect adolescents from nicotine dependence and address inequities.

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