

Brief original article

Opinions and practices regarding electronic cigarette use among Romanian high school students



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study assessed awareness, opinions, practices regarding electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and factors associated with their use among Romanian high school students.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted in 2013 in two major Romanian cities, distributing anonymous questionnaires to 342 high school students aged 16–18.

Results: 52.3% of the smokers, 29.2% of the ex-smokers and 7% of the never-smokers had tried e-cigarettes at least once in their life; 7.8% of the smokers and 4.6% of the ex-smokers had used e-cigarettes in the last month. Among smokers, e-cigarette use was associated with lower participation in school health education regarding e-cigarettes and with having parents using e-cigarettes. Among ex-smokers and never-smokers, e-cigarette use was associated with intention to use e-cigarettes in the next year and with having friends who use e-cigarettes.

Conclusion: Health education programmes and regulatory interventions addressing e-cigarettes are needed in Romania. More research is necessary on how to develop effective public health messages.

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Opiniones y prácticas en relación con los cigarrillos electrónicos en estudiantes rumanos

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Este estudio evaluó el conocimiento, las opiniones y las prácticas en relación con los cigarrillos electrónicos (e-cigarrillos), y los factores asociados a su uso, en estudiantes de colegio de Rumanía.

Método: Se realizó un estudio transversal mediante cuestionarios anónimos en 2013 en dos grandes ciudades de Rumanía, en 342 estudiantes de colegio de 16 a 18 años de edad.

Resultados: El 52,3% de los fumadores, el 29,2% de los ex fumadores y el 7% de los nunca fumadores habían probado los e-cigarrillos al menos una vez en la vida; el 7,8% de los fumadores y el 4,6% de los ex fumadores utilizaron e-cigarrillos en el último mes. Entre los fumadores, la experimentación con e-cigarrillos se asoció a una menor participación en actividades de educación sanitaria escolar al respecto y a tener padres que usan e-cigarrillos. Entre los ex fumadores y los que nunca han fumado, la experimentación con e-cigarrillos se asoció con la intención de utilizarlos en el próximo año y con tener amigos que los utilizan.

Conclusión: Se necesitan programas de educación para la salud e intervenciones reguladoras que aborden los e-cigarrillos en Rumanía. Es necesaria más investigación sobre cómo desarrollar mensajes eficaces de salud pública.

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Palabras clave:

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Introduction

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are devices that deliver to the lung aerosols usually containing nicotine and other compounds.¹

They are promoted as an alternative to traditional tobacco cigarette smoking, but there are several concerns regarding their

use: evidence about their safety and efficacy for smoking cessation remains limited, while they may increase the risk of non-smokers developing nicotine dependence and of current smokers maintaining their dependence.^{1–5} Moreover, their novel nature and flavouring combined with an unrestricted marketing and sale in several countries may appeal to youth and e-cigarette experimentation might result in use of other tobacco products.^{3,6,7}

Nevertheless, similar with other developing countries from Europe, the effect of the growing popularity and availability of e-cigarettes on Romanian adolescents is inadequately characterised.

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Hence, this study has two objectives. First, it will assess awareness, opinions and practices regarding electronic cigarettes use among high school students from Romania. Second, it aims to identify correlates of experimentation with e-cigarettes among Romanian adolescents.

Methods

Participants and recruitment

A cross-sectional study was conducted in May 2013 in 6 high schools situated in 2 big cities from North-Western Romania – three high schools from Cluj-Napoca (a town with approximately 330,000 inhabitants) and three high schools from Sibiu (a town having approximately 147,000 inhabitants). The study was approved by the review committees of the management boards of the participating schools. From each high school there were randomly chosen 1-2 classes from 10th grade and 1-2 classes from 11th grade.

Instrument

The students were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and were asked to fill in an anonymous questionnaire. All students agreed to participate.

The questionnaire assessed socio-demographic characteristics, awareness and sources of information regarding electronic cigarettes. Opinions about e-cigarettes, their use during lifetime and in the last month, reasons for using them, intention to use them in the next year and experimentation with e-cigarettes by people from the social environment were also investigated. Smoking behaviour was also evaluated; persons who smoked traditional cigarettes in the last month were defined as smokers, those who smoked in the past but not in the last month were considered ex-smokers and students who never smoked traditional cigarettes were never-smokers. Number of cigarettes smoked per day and the intention to quit smoking in the future was also investigated among smokers.

Table 1
Opinions and practices regarding e-cigarette use by traditional tobacco cigarette consumption. High school students aged 16–18. Romania, 2013.

	Total sample N = 342 %	Smokers N = 128 %	Ex-smokers N = 65 %	Never smokers N = 149 %
Awareness				
Ever heard about e-cigarettes	93.9	93.8	96.9	92.6
Sources of information about e-cigarettes				
Internet	57.6	63.3 ^{a,b}	47.7 ^c	57
Sales points	27.1	25	23.1	30.9
Newspapers	14	17.2 ^b	15.4	10.7
Friends	65.2	74.2 ^{a,b}	67.7 ^c	56.4
People from the same school year	39.7	50.8 ^{a,b}	38.5	30.9
Parents	14.6	21.9 ^{a,b}	12.3	9.4
Siblings	7.9	7.8	7.6	8.1
School health education lessons	11.9	12.5	6.2	14.1
Opinions				
<i>E-cigarettes are less dangerous</i>				
I totally agree/I partially agree	54.3	57 ^b	55.5	49
I do not know	31.7	27.5 ^{a,b}	33.8	36.9
I totally disagree/I partially disagree	14	15.5	10.7	14.1
<i>E-cigarettes can help smokers to quit</i>				
I totally agree/I partially agree	52.6	54.7 ^b	61.5 ^c	47
I do not know	28.6	18.8 ^b	27.7 ^c	37.6
I totally disagree/I partially disagree	18.8	26.6 ^{a,b}	10.7	15.6
<i>E-cigarettes are used only by smokers</i>				
I totally agree/I partially agree	45.7	50 ^b	49.2 ^c	40.3
I do not know	33.6	25.8 ^b	26.2 ^c	43.6
I totally disagree/I partially disagree	20.7	24.2 ^b	24.6 ^c	16.1
Social influences				
Friends have tried e-cigarettes	67.1	70.3	61.5	67.1
People from the same school year have tried e-cigarettes	45.3	53.1 ^b	44.6	38.9
Parents have tried e-cigarettes	7.3	10.9	6.1	5.0
Siblings have tried e-cigarettes	8.8	19.5 ^{a,b}	4.6	1.3
Behavior				
Used e-cigarettes at least once during lifetime	28.9	52.3 ^{a,b}	29.2 ^c	8.7
Used e-cigarettes in the last month	3	7.8	4.6	0
Reasons for trying e-cigarettes among high school students who experimented with them^d				
E-cigarettes are less dangerous	20.2	22.7 ^a	10.5 ^c	23.1
To reduce the number of traditional cigarettes	-	17.7 ^b	10.5	0
To quit smoking	-	17.9 ^b	4.2	0
Curiosity	57.5	55.8 ^b	68.4 ^c	46.2
Other friends also tried e-cigarettes	18.2	13.4 ^b	15.7 ^c	46.2
Intention to use e-cigarettes in the next year				
Definitely yes/probably yes	13.9	32 ^{a,b}	12.3	7.4
I do not know	18.1	35.9 ^{a,b}	24.6 ^c	10.7
Definitely no/probably no	68	32.1 ^{a,b}	63.1	81.9

^a Statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$ at chi-square test) between smokers and ex-smokers.

^b Statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$ at chi-square test) between smokers and never smokers.

^c Statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$ at chi-square test) between ex-smokers and never-smokers.

^d The percentages are calculated for students who ever tried e-cigarettes.

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