



## Short communication

## Prevalence and correlates of smoking and e-cigarette use among young men who have sex with men and transgender women

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Although the prevalence of cigarette smoking in the United States has decreased, rates remain elevated among sexual and gender minorities (SGMs). This study examined rates and correlates of tobacco use among young men who have sex with men (YMSM) and transgender women.

**Methods:** Participants (N = 771) were drawn from the baseline assessment of an ongoing longitudinal cohort study of racially diverse MSM aged 16–29 years. Data collection took place in 2015–2016. Socio-demographic and SGM-specific (e.g., gender identity, sexual identity, physical attraction) correlates of cigarette smoking and electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) use were identified using logistic regression.

**Results:** Twenty-one percent were current cigarette smokers. Nearly 40% ever tried an e-cigarette, but regular e-cigarette use was low (3.8%). Smokers were more likely to be older (vs. aged 16–18), less educated, homeless, bisexual or identify as some other sexual minority (vs. gay), attracted to males and females equally or more attracted to females than males (vs. males only), and HIV-positive. E-cigarette users were more likely to be transgender women (vs. cisgender men), White (vs. Black), more educated, and mostly attracted to females.

**Conclusions:** Findings highlight important risk factors for tobacco use among SGM youth. Correlates of smoking mirrored findings observed in the general population, but also included factors specific to SGM youth (e.g., sexual orientation, HIV status, homelessness). Although some variables (gender identity, attraction) demonstrated similar relationships with smoking and e-cigarette use, others (race/ethnicity, education) demonstrated opposite patterns. Findings underscore the urgent need for tobacco prevention and cessation interventions for SGM youth.

## 1. Introduction

Although the prevalence of cigarette smoking in the United States has decreased, rates remain elevated among sexual and gender minorities (SGMs; e.g., individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, LGBT) (Jamal et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009). Numerous studies have documented significantly higher rates of cigarette smoking among sexual minorities than their heterosexual counterparts (Dai, 2017; Emory et al., 2016; Fallin-Bennett et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2016). Similar disparities have been observed for transgender individuals (Buchting et al., 2017; Smalley et al., 2016), although less data are available.

The literature on tobacco use among SGM populations is characterized by several gaps. Most studies have compared LGB individuals to their heterosexual counterparts and, in doing so, the large majority combine all sexual minority individuals into a single category (Blosnich et al., 2011; Jamal et al., 2016). Although such work has brought

attention to tobacco-related disparities among SGMs, it fails to acknowledge the wide range of individuals that fall under the larger SGM umbrella and obscures differences within SGM subgroups. In addition, few studies have examined relationships between tobacco use and different aspects of sexual orientation such as sexual identity (e.g., whether someone identifies as gay or bisexual) and physical attraction (e.g., the sex of individuals to whom someone is physically attracted). Most studies typically assess only one aspect, usually sexual identity. Different components of sexual orientation may display different relationships with tobacco use.

Further, little is known about use of emerging tobacco products such as electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) among SGMs. E-cigarettes remain controversial in the public health community because although they appear to pose less health risk than combustible cigarettes and may help current smokers quit (Glasser et al., 2017; Malas et al., 2016), their use may simply prolong smoking (i.e., lead to dual use) and encourage youth to start smoking (Leventhal et al., 2015; Primack et al., 2015).

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Studies in the United States have documented increases in e-cigarette use since 2011 (Singh et al., 2016), especially among sexual minority adolescents and young adults (Dai, 2017; Fallin-Bennett et al., 2017).

The present study examined correlates of cigarette smoking and e-cigarette use among late adolescent and young adult (16–29 year-old) men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women – a population displaying elevated rates of tobacco use (Fallin-Bennett et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2016). The goal of this study was not to compare gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals to their heterosexual/cisgender peers, but rather to identify correlates of tobacco use *within* a large cohort of racially diverse MSM reporting different sexual (e.g., gay, bisexual) and gender identities (e.g., cisgender man, transgender woman). Another objective was to identify correlates of tobacco use that may be specific to SGMs, such as gender identity and sexual orientation (as assessed by both sexual identity and physical attraction).

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

Data were collected as part of RADAR, an ongoing longitudinal cohort study of young MSM (YMSM) and transgender women in the Chicago metropolitan area. Informed consent was obtained for participants ages  $\geq 18$  and informed assent with a decisional capacity assessment and waiver of parental consent was obtained for 16–17 year olds. Participants were recruited using various methodologies. A subset of participants from two existing longitudinal cohort studies, Project Q2 (Mustanski et al., 2016) and Crew 450 (Mustanski et al., 2017) who were first recruited in 2007 and 2010 respectively, were eligible for enrollment. In 2015, a third cohort was recruited using similar approaches to the prior studies. These recruits must have been between 16 and 20 years of age, assigned male sex at birth, spoke English, and had a sexual encounter with a man in the previous year or identified as gay, bisexual, or transgender. Next, the RADAR cohort was expanded through an iterative process by which initial seeds' serious romantic partners were recruited at each visit. All serious romantic partners who were assigned male sex at birth were eligible for enrollment regardless of gender identity or sexual behavior, attraction, or identity. Lastly, cohort members could refer three peers for enrollment, as long as they were aged 16–29 and met other criteria.

Data for the current analyses were drawn from 771 participants who completed the baseline assessment between February 2015 and November 2016. Sixty percent were age 21 or younger and over 75% identified as a racial/ethnic minority (Table 1).

### 2.2. Measures

We assessed socio-demographic characteristics, HIV status, and tobacco use. Participants not previously diagnosed with HIV received HIV testing. A positive test was confirmed via laboratory testing (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Association of Public Health Laboratories, 2014). Lifetime prevalence of cigarette smoking and e-cigarette use were assessed with the following questions drawn from the Monitoring the Future study (Johnston et al., 2015; Johnston et al., 2010): “Have you ever smoked cigarettes?” “Have you ever smoked e-cigarettes?” Response options included: Never, Once or twice, Occasionally but not regularly, Regularly in the past, Regularly now. Participants who responded “regularly now” were classified as current smokers. Because e-cigarettes are a relatively new tobacco product and any regular use is likely to be recent, participants who responded “regularly now” or “regularly in the past” were classified as e-cigarette users. We also assessed past 30 day use among participants who ever used cigarettes or e-cigarettes.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive Statistics for Socio-demographic Characteristics, HIV Status, and Lifetime Prevalence of Cigarette Smoking and E-Cigarette Use (N = 771).

Variable	N (%)
Age category	
16–18 years	202 (26)
19–21 years	263 (34)
22–24 years	208 (27)
25–29 years	98 (13)
Race/Ethnicity	
White	178 (23)
Black or African American	278 (36)
Hispanic/Latino	226 (29)
Multiracial or Other	88 (11)
Education	
Less than high school	150 (19)
GED	33 (4)
High school diploma	158 (21)
Trade school certificate <sup>a</sup>	8 (1)
Some college	342 (44)
Undergraduate degree	60 (8)
Some graduate school/grad degree	20 (3)
Current student	
No	315 (41)
Yes	456 (59)
Current employment	
Not employed	289 (38)
Part-time	277 (36)
Full-time	205 (27)
Living situation	
Parents	284 (37)
Alone	95 (12)
Other family members	71 (9)
Roommate	223 (29)
Boyfriend/girlfriend/partner	70 (9)
Shelter/No permanent address	28 (4)
Gender identity	
Cisgender man	709 (92)
Transgender woman	47 (6)
Other	15 (2)
Sexual identity	
Gay	534 (69)
Bisexual	165 (21)
Other	72 (9)
Physical attraction	
Only males	470 (61)
Mostly males, but some females	215 (28)
Males and females equally	51 (7)
Mostly females, but some males	31 (4)
Only females <sup>b</sup>	2 (< 1)
Not attracted to anyone <sup>b</sup>	2 (< 1)
HIV status	
Negative	619 (80)
Positive	139 (18)
Unknown <sup>b</sup>	13 (2)
Lifetime prevalence combustible cigarettes	
Never	255 (33)
Once or twice	158 (21)
Occasionally	129 (17)
Regularly in the past	70 (9)
Regularly now	159 (21)
Lifetime prevalence electronic cigarettes	
Never	477 (62)
Once or twice	195 (25)
Occasionally	70 (9)
Regularly in the past	18 (2)
Regularly now	11 (1)

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error. GED = General Education Development degree.

<sup>a</sup> Due to its small size, this category was combined with “high school diploma” for the logistic regression analyses.

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