

Young adults' perceptions about established and emerging tobacco products: results from eight focus groups.

Authors

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Affiliation

Division of Behavior Science & Health Education, Saint Louis University School of Public Health, 3545 Lafayette Avenue, Saint Louis, MO 63104, USA.

wray@slu.edu

Abstract

INTRODUCTION: In order to sustain their market, tobacco producers target young adults through novel product design and marketing strategies. Public health professionals need to understand young adults' risks perceptions about and use of new tobacco products to best inform tobacco control interventions.

METHODS: In 2009, researchers conducted 8 focus groups with 67 young adults stratified by self-reported tobacco use and nonuse, residence in rural and urban areas, and living in a state with or without a statewide smoking restriction policy. Participants provided feedback about their knowledge and risk perceptions about and use of tobacco products and marketing.

RESULTS: Participants reported a high level of familiarity with a wide range of novel tobacco products. A great deal of confusion and disagreement appeared with regard to absolute and relative risk of different tobacco products. Participants readily discussed using smokeless tobacco products as alternatives to smoking when smoking is prohibited. Fewer differences in tobacco-related knowledge risk perceptions and use were found between urban and rural participants and those in smoke-free policy and nonpolicy states than between user and nonuser groups. Both users and nonusers were familiar with and skeptical about tobacco marketing and prevention efforts.

CONCLUSIONS: Young adults are familiar with many tobacco products, but they convey little understanding of relative risks of new or trendy tobacco products, such as snus or hookah. Mindful of industry innovation, tobacco control advocates must continuously update prevention efforts, seeking new strategies to limit promotion, marketing, and use of new and conventional products.

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