High School and College Students Knowledge about and Perceptions of Flavored Electronic Cigarettes
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BACKGROUND RATIONALE & STUDY GOALS
- Electronic cigarette (i.e., Ecig) use is on the rise; 10% of high school students (CDC, 2011) and 5% of college students (Sutin, 2013) report lifetime use.
- The increased popularity of Ecigs among young people may be due, in part, to the availability of over 100 Ecig flavors (e.g., mint, berry).
- Flavors may prompt youth to try Ecigs and, in some cases, to develop nicotine addiction. Some youth may progress to smoking cigarettes.
- The current study examined high school and college students’ knowledge about and perceptions of flavored Ecigs.

METHODS
- Study Design:
  - 16 focus groups in two colleges (n = 59 students) and two high schools (n = 52) in CT.
  - Focus groups were stratified by gender and cigarette smoking status.
  - A standard focus group guide was used to ask participants about their knowledge of Ecigs.

Data Analysis:
- Group discussions were recorded, transcribed, and examined using framework analysis technique by coding for a priori concepts and emergent themes.

3. CONCERNS ABOUT FLAVORED ECIGS
- 10 comments were made raising concerns about flavored Ecigs; 8 by female smokers
- 4 Categories of Concern:
  1. FLAVORS INCREASE ADDICTION (n=1)  
     "I would think it is more addicting."  
     Female College Smoker
  2. FLAVORS APPEAL TO KIDS (n=7)  
     "Young people [are attracted to Ecigs] the way they used to have flavored cigarettes before they outlawed them."  
     Male College Smoker
     "I would assume that a young female would get something fruity or like bubble gum...that’s so crazy."  
     Female College Smoker
     "If you’re 16, I could ask somebody to buy me a pack or I could get this cigarette that tastes like cotton candy."  
     Female College Smoker
  3. FLAVORS MAY BE DANGEROUS (n=1)  
     "The chemicals they use to make flavors, that’s probably as bad as smoking a cigarette."  
     Female College Smoker
  4. FLAVORS EASE THE TRANSITION TO SMOKING CIGARETTES (n=1)  
     "When people first try smoking they start coughing and stuff. Maybe if it was in a different flavor it might be an easier transition."  
     Female College Non Smoker

4. TASTE OF ECIGS (in general)
- Never tried Ecigs: Positive perceived taste by female college students
  "The flavor of chocolate without any calories!"  
  Female High School Smoker
  "They taste nasty!"  
  Female High School Smoker
  "The good ones are awesome!"  
  Male College Smoker
- 8 comments that taste is impacted by the flavor in question, the brand, and price/quality.

5. TASTE OF ECIGS (versus Cigarettes)
- 17 comments were made comparing the taste of Ecigs to cigarettes (most among smokers).
- 4 categories were noted:
  1. SAME AS CIGARETTES (n=2)  
     "It didn’t taste any different."  
     Female College Non Smoker
  2. DIFFERENT THAN CIGARETTES (n=6)  
     "It almost tastes like a menthol cigarette, but it is just not the same."  
     Female College Smoker
  3. BETTER THAN CIGARETTES (n=5)  
     "[Ecigs] taste so much better than a regular cigarette."  
     Female College Smoker
     "I actually like [Ecigs] better than smoking cigarettes."  
     Female College Smoker
     "[Ecigs] taste a lot better too."  
     Male College Smoker
  4. WORSE THAN CIGARETTES (n=4)  
     "They taste weird to me. They’re not the same as cigarettes."  
     Female College Smoker
     "It was so gross. The taste in my mouth wasn’t like normal smoke."  
     Male College Smoker
     "The taste did not appeal to me."  
     Male College Smoker

CONCLUSIONS
- Students were aware that there are many flavors of Ecigs.
- Across all groups, 3 categories of flavors were noted (i.e., tobacco / menthol; candy; and fruit).
- More students who had tried Ecigs described their flavor negatively than positively, although brand and cost influenced flavor quality.
- Students largely agreed that Ecigs taste different than cigarettes but disagreed whether Ecigs taste better or worse.
- In sum, Ecig flavors appeal to high school and college students and may increase risk for experimentation in non-smokers and smokers. Among those who had tried Ecigs, many disliked their flavor both independently and relative to regular cigarettes.

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