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VAPING PERCEPTIONS, CONCERNS, AND USE OF FLAVORED PRODUCTS: PRELIMINARY QUALITATIVE RESULTS

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Abstract:

Significance: Limited research has been done about consumer beliefs, behaviors, and experiences with vaping. This study aims to better understand the experiences of vape device users including health concerns, flavored product and device preferences, reasons for vaping and reasons for quitting. **Methods:** A total of 22 semi-structured interviews (focus groups and key informant interviews) were conducted via Zoom. Demographic information was collected using REDCap. Participants (N=52) provided thoughts and reactions to electronic cigarette use, flavor availability and marketing, and experiences with vaping and cessation. A team of coders developed a code book for transcribed interviews resulting in 159 distinct domain codes. Each unit of analysis (quote) was coded using these codes by two independent coders who then compared and confirmed a final set of codes for each transcript. Codes were condensed and categorized into 10 over-arching themes. **Results:** Of the 52 participants, 20 (38.5%) identified as female. The median age was 27.5 years. Results show a diversity of perspectives and experiences with vaping. Interpretable over-arching themes (n=10) were endorsed between 22 and 452 times. Most represented were Health Perceptions and Product Perceptions, with a wide range of beliefs, often including positive perceptions (especially relative to cigarettes). Perceptions of Flavor Use (other than tobacco or menthol) were common. Other themes included Legislation, Reasons to Vape, and Cessation Efforts. **Conclusion:** Participants had diverse experiences with vaping and with vaping flavors other than tobacco or menthol. Most did not support flavor bans. Many ways of acquiring flavored juice were reported, including subverting flavor bans. Some participants indicated they may try to quit vaping if flavors were inaccessible. Participants favored devices that are cost effective, compact and discrete. They mostly reported no health concerns and believe vaping to be safer than smoking. Most believe there is not enough research to know if vaping is dangerous, although some report that research showing health risks would cause them to consider quitting. Barriers to cessation included nicotine addiction and fear of not being able to manage stress. These themes can inform further studies of the nuances of the experiences of vape device users. **Supported by** The National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the FDA (TCORS Grant U54CA228110).

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