

Forum: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Issue: Reducing Adolescent Use of Electronic Cigarettes

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Introduction

The complication enclosing the use of electronic cigarettes, otherwise known as Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), as claimed by World Health Organization (WHO) is that they are “undoubtedly harmful”, “a present and real threat” and do not help people quit smoking tobacco. In July of 2019, WHO has called for regulation of e-cigarettes as there is no proof they help smokers quit their habit and said may even act as a gateway drug for the younger population to start using conventional cigarettes and said that “there is no difference between tobacco and heated tobacco products”. Moreover, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not approved vaping as a method of smoking cessation, as of 2019, because e-cigarettes contain harmful ingredients such as nickel, tin, lead, volatile organic compounds, flavorings that contain chemicals linked to severe lung diseases, and addictive nicotine.

The number of ‘vapers’ have been increasing drastically from about 7 million in 2011 to 41 million in 2018, with 3.6 million teen vapers around the world because these teenagers are curious about the product and the flavors it contains, and it is widely believed that e-cigarettes are safer than conventional cigarettes. Although the promoters of e-cigarettes claim that vaping exposes users to lower levels of toxins such as nicotine, the vaping death toll of teenagers has risen to at least 26 in the United States alone with 150 teens suffering from serious lung ailments, and 7 deaths in India. The predicament surrounding the reduction of adolescent use of e-cigarettes requires the immediate attention of the United Nations as it plays a crucial role in shaping the future of the younger population for the better.

Definition of Key Terms

Electronic Cigarettes

A cigarette-shaped device containing nicotine-based that stimulates the experience of smoking tobacco. Electronic cigarettes became more popular through the snowball effect- where one person sees another person using the e-cigarette- so a person becomes curious and uses it. Besides, the belief that the usage of e-cigarettes is a method of smoking cessation increases the usage of e-cigarettes. There are different kinds of e-cigarettes, but Juul products are widely used. These e-cigarettes look like a flash drive and can be charged in a laptop's USB port. It produces less smoke than conventional tobacco, but a Juul pod is equivalent to a single pack of conventional tobacco.

Gateway Drug

A habit-forming drug that leads to more addictive and dangerous drugs. The Gateway Drug Theory is that when mild drug substances are consumed, the person would eventually end up using stronger and more addictive drugs with a higher dosage. Examples of gateway drugs include nicotine, marijuana, and alcohol. The impacts of such drugs range from negative changes in social life to depression.

Smoking Cessation

A process to quit smoking. Methods of smoking cessation include the usage of nicotine replacement products such as adhesive patches, chewing gum, nasal spray, hypnosis, seeking counseling or going to commercial/ voluntary clinics. E-cigarettes are not considered a method of smoking cessation because nearly 60% of e-cigarette users also smoke conventional cigarettes, which means that most people who intended to use e-cigarette as a method of smoking cessation ended up consuming both the e-cigarette and conventional tobacco.

Vaping

Inhaling the vapor produced by electronic cigarettes. E-cigarettes have cartridges filled with a liquid that usually contains nicotine, flavorings and other chemicals. The liquid is heated into vapor, and the 'vaper' inhales this vapor. Vaping is less harmful than smoking conventional tobacco, but it still poses harm to the body if consumed in excess and is still as addictive as conventional tobacco as it contains the same levels of nicotine.

History

Origin and development of electronic cigarettes

The first documents referenced to e-cigarettes were published in the 1930s when Joseph Robinson patented it in the USA. However, there is no evidence to show that this technology was ever put into use, or a prototype is created.

The first physical model resembling a non-tobacco cigarette device was designed by Herbert A. Gilbert in 1967. Gilbert never got to enjoy the benefits of his products because they were ahead of time and it heavily resembled conventional tobacco, so people prefer to use the original cigarettes. This non-tobacco cigarette was thought to be a safe and harmless substitute for traditional tobacco because when it was first produced, harmful substances such as nicotine and flavorings were not a part of the product. These devices were driven out of the market as a result of low demand from the consumers, ten years before the mass-production of e-cigarettes began.

In 2003, Hon Lik, a Chinese pharmacist developed the product to what's called a first-generation e-cigarette where diluted liquid nicotine is vaporized, as a safer and cleaner way to inhale nicotine as a smoking cessation resource, after his father passed away from lung cancer. Hon Lik introduced his e-cigarettes to the Chinese market in 2004 and by 2007, e-cigarettes expanded to America when the leading cigarette company of America called Lorillard acquired Blu purchased the e-cigarettes from China and started selling them. The buying and selling of e-cigarettes have become so lucrative that America is recognized as the country with the most usage of e-cigarettes among people of all ages. The e-cigarette market was enlarged to other countries when they were sold in large quantities online.

Key Issues

Health risks

In vaping, a battery-powered e-cigarette heats a liquid into a vapor that can be inhaled. This vapor may contain addictive drug nicotine, flavorings, and other carcinogenic chemicals. E-cigarettes are also found to be used with detrimental drugs such as hash oil, ketamine, and LSD.

The rising popularity of vaping has been dramatic, especially among teenagers because these teenagers are curious about the product and the flavors it contains, and it is widely

believed that e-cigarettes are safer than conventional cigarettes. According to research conducted by the Harvard Medical School, it has been found that the number of high school vapers has increased from 28% in 2017 to 37% in 2018, with 3.6 million middle and high school students using e-cigarettes. This study concluded that vaping may be driving an increase in nicotine use for teens, and may encourage them to start smoking conventional tobacco, which contains destructive amounts of nicotine. Vaping poses serious health risks such as Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), heart attack, increased blood pressure and heart rate, damage to the arteries and lung cancer, especially when it is used alongside other lethal addicting drugs. Exposure to nicotine at a young age can lead to nicotine dependence, which results in nicotine poisoning, otherwise known as nicotine overdose occurs when nicotine is inhaled over the limit of what one can hold, slow development of the brain and brings harm to the heart, as well as the gastrointestinal system. A human brain develops until the age of 25 or older, and this development can be brought to harm by nicotine. When young children and teenagers are exposed to nicotine, they become vulnerable to nicotine addiction, resulting in having trouble concentrating and paying attention. The functions of the brain can be altered by the usage of nicotine, for the rest of their lives.

Pregnant women erroneously believe that vaping is less harmful than smoking conventional tobacco, and the percentage of e-cigarette use is higher among pregnant women than women who aren't pregnant. FDA has suggested that pregnant women should not make use of any vaping cigarette, regardless of the flavoring and substance contained in it because although producers have claimed their e-cigarettes to be "nicotine-free", but have been found to contain nicotine. It has also been said that no matter the method of nicotine consumption, whether it is vaping or smoking conventional tobacco, infants face the same risk from nicotine exposure such as brain and lung damage, and increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

The American Heart Association has discovered that e-cigarettes are unsafe to non-users via third-hand exposure, as a chain smoker is more likely to be harmed by the toxins than the actual smoker. Like conventional tobacco, the smoke of e-cigarettes may stick to the surrounding surface and is hard to remove. Nicotine can accumulate on surfaces where e-cigarettes have been used, which may be inhaled by young infants and children, long after they were used. This can cause acute nicotine poisoning and may lead to nicotine addiction to young children.

In 2019, there has been an outbreak of severe lung illness linked to vaping products, with the United States holding the most affected users. This illness has sickened more than 2200 people and killed 48. As the illness and deaths proliferated, more anti-vaping laws were established in places such as San Francisco, Rhode Island and New York. In recent times, researchers have discovered that the cause of severe lung illness is the consequence of the

usage of Vitamin E acetate, an ingredient found primarily in black market vapes containing THC, the main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis.

Electronic cigarettes and the Black Market

Taxes for e-cigarettes and tobacco-related products are heavily taxed in America, China, the United Kingdom, and other European countries. In countries such as Brazil and Singapore, e-cigarettes are banned. These heavy-handed restrictions and increased excise taxes on e-cigarettes and other tobacco-related products have created a thriving black market for these products. As a result of e-cigarettes made unavailable and hard to gain access to in various countries, teenagers have resorted to buying e-cigarettes from the black market. These black market cigarettes can be purchased easily online, or in unauthorized shops on the streets. Lung illnesses have uprose, killing thousands of people, as a consequence of lethal substances such as Vitamin E acetate and THC which are found only in e-cigarettes sold in the black market. Researchers have concluded that these illnesses uprose as a result of e-cigarettes being banned, so people resorted to buying illegal e-cigarettes off from the black market. Therefore, it is a controversy that these anti-vaping laws or prohibitionist policies supporting the banning of e-cigarettes may be doing more harm than good.

Environmental Risks

The flavorings of e-cigarettes come in plastic cartridges and are single-use plastic products like plastic straws. For example, each e-cigarette pod contains 200 puffs, roughly the amount of nicotine contained in one cigarette pack, and is not intended to be reused. These plastic pods after being used can be then discarded into rivers or simply on the streets, harming the environment.

E-cigarettes can leak heavy metals such as tin, nickel, lead and residual nicotine into the environment. Because of the presence of these heavy metals and additives, e-cigarettes can be categorized under e-wastes and hazardous wastes. However, regardless of the toxins contained in e-cigarettes, the producers of e-cigarettes have not introduced a recycling program for its products and even advise the people to throw the used products into a regular trash can.

Furthermore, explosions and burns have been reported with e-cigarettes while simply using the device or recharging it, due to defective batteries. 2035 cases of burns and injuries resulting from e-cigarette explosions have been reported from 2015 to 2017. In February 2019, a Texas man has died when the e-cigarette he was using exploded and tore his carotid artery.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO is a public health agency under the United Nations which governs global health and disease issues. WHO is responsible for directing and coordinating international and public health policies. The WHO has said that e-cigarettes are “undoubtedly harmful” and do not believe that the use of e-cigarettes is a method of smoking cessation because, with the presence of nicotine and other chemicals in e-cigarettes, it has been made impossible to consider e-cigarettes as a method of smoking cessation. Moreover, research conducted by The Truth Initiative organization, which is an anti-tobacco organization, has shown that nearly 60% of e-cigarette users also used conventional cigarettes. The WHO is working with the FDA towards posing stricter regulations of e-cigarettes, by banning it in several countries, raising excise taxes and banning the advertising of e-cigarettes or any other tobacco-related products.

Food and Drugs Administration (FDA)

FDA is an agency under the United States Department of Health and Human Services. It is responsible for protecting the public and international health by regulating the safety of human and veterinary drugs, biological products, medical services, and food supply. On the 8th of August in 2016, the FDA's foundational 'deeming rule' went into effect which gave the agency authority over all ENDS products including e-cigarettes, e-pipes, and e-liquids. This rule granted the power to the FDA on whether or not to ban e-cigarettes in certain places and has made the selling of e-cigarettes to teenagers younger than 18 years illegal. FDA has not yet approved vaping as a method of smoking cessation, because of the addicting substances contained in e-cigarettes.

United States of America

In 2016, the USFDA has mandated e-cigarettes to be regulated as tobacco products and subjected electronic cigarettes to regulate under the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (FDCA) before importation and sale in the United States. As a result of an outbreak of lung illness linked to vaping products that sickened hundreds of people and the death of 6 people, the Donald Trump Administration has been working towards banning e-cigarette liquid flavors since September of 2019, and a photo ID is now required to purchase an e-cigarette. The USA has also banned vaping on school grounds, and places such as New York and Rhode Island.

China

China is the first-ever country to gain access to e-cigarettes, with more than 7.4 million consumers of e-cigarettes, and is the largest producer of e-cigarette products. In 2017, Beijing, the capital of China, has banned the sale of e-cigarettes to children below the age of 18. The Chinese authorities are working towards banning the selling of e-cigarettes online illegal, and have called for a ban on consuming e-cigarettes in public, to lower the risk of chain-smoking. However, as said by the head of the Electronic Cigarette Industry Committee of China, no laws and regulations are banning the sales of electronic cigarettes online yet. The producers of e-cigarettes are afraid to lose the tax revenue they get from the selling of e-cigarettes.

India

The Indian government announced a ban on the production, import, and sales of e-cigarettes as they pose a risk to health. India's Health Ministry, which proposed the ban, says it is in the public interest to ensure vaping doesn't become an "epidemic" and a "style statement" among young children. However, vaping equipment, such as a vaporizer, has not yet been made illegal. People opposing this law will serve jail time of 3 years, but conventional tobacco users will not be affected.

European Union

In May 2016, the European Union Tobacco Products Directive came into effect, and this provided stricter regulations for e-cigarettes. This directive limits the advertising of e-cigarettes in print, television, and radio, along with reductions in the level of nicotine and liquid flavors put in e-cigarettes. It also restricts the purchase of e-cigarettes for anyone under the age of 18.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
	Creation of the first e-cigarette figure
1965	Herbert A. Gilbert created the first device that closely resembled the modern e-cigarette. This device did not make use of nicotine like modern e-cigarettes do.

Birth of modern e-cigarettes

2003

In 2003, the first commercially successful e-cigarette was created in China by Hon Lik, a smoker himself.

April 2006

Introduction of e-cigarettes to Europe and United States

E-cigarettes expanded to America when the leading cigarette company of America called Lorillard acquired Blu, purchased the e-cigarettes from China and started selling them. The e-cigarette market was enlarged to Europe when they were sold in large quantities online.

September
2008

Proclamation of WHO

The WHO has said that it does not consider e-cigarettes to be a legitimate smoking cessation aid and demands producers to remove suggestions that say that e-cigarettes have been approved by the agency.

March 2009

Rejection of e-cigarettes into the USA

FDA directed the US Customs and Border Protection to reject the entry of e-cigarettes into the country because they are unapproved drug delivery services.

June 2009

Family Smoking Prevention and Control Act

Barack Obama signed the Family Smoking Prevention and Control Act, which gave the FDA the power to regulate the tobacco industry, including e-cigarettes.

April 2011

Regulation of e-cigarettes by FDA

FDA announces it will regulate e-cigarettes the way it regulates conventional cigarettes under the Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act.

January 2016 **Child Nicotine Poisoning Prevention Act**

This act requires the packaging of “liquid nicotine containers” to be subject to child poison prevention standards.

2019 **Outbreak of lung illness linked to vaping products**

An outbreak of severe lung illness linked to vaping products occurred in the United States. This illness has sickened more than 2200 people and killed 48. In recent times, researchers have discovered that the cause of the severe lung illness is the consequence of the usage of Vitamin E acetate, an ingredient found primarily in black market vapes containing THC, the main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

To reduce the adolescent use of e-cigarettes, which has been increasing exponentially, agencies such as FDA and WHO have stricken its rules and regulations regarding the importation, buying and selling of electronic cigarettes. These rules and regulations have become successful, seeing as a global superpower country like America has imposed stronger taxes on e-cigarettes and banned it in certain areas completely. Countries such as Japan, Brazil, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, Qatar, India, and Uruguay have completely banned e-cigarettes and the products related to it such as e-liquids and e-pens. South Korea has legalized the sale and use of e-cigarettes but is heavily taxed. In 2014, the European Parliament passed rules and regulations requiring standardization and quality control e-liquids and vaporizers, disclosure of ingredients in liquids, and child-proofing and tamper-proofing for liquid packaging. In the United States, some states now tax e-cigarettes as tobacco products and as of 2017, 7 states such as Massachusetts and New York have fully banned e-cigarettes, with at least 48 states banning the sale of e-cigarettes to minors. The United States has also tightened regulations around e-cigarettes after suffering the most from the outbreak of lung illness linked to vaping products in 2019.

Possible Solutions

Posing stricter rules and regulations around the buying, selling and using of e-cigarettes and its products or completely banning e-cigarettes are possible solutions to reducing the adolescent use of e-cigarettes, for example, collecting higher taxes on tobacco-related products. Such taxes should be imposed on both the consumer, producer and supplier of tobacco-related products. By imposing these taxes, both the producers and consumers would be discouraged to buy the products, as it would take up too much out of their disposable income. However, after the establishment of anti-vaping laws as a result of the lung illness outbreak linked to vaping products in 2019, teenagers have resorted to buying e-cigarettes through the black market, which does more harm to the body as it contains pernicious substances unlike the legal e-cigarettes under the authorization of the FDA.

Another possible solution to this predicament could be the **reintroduction of non-flavored and more diluted nicotine vapor e-cigarettes**, which are much safer than the ones containing flavorings such as strawberry, citrus, and orange. Flavorings could cause lung inflammation and lung toxicity. Although nicotine is harmful to the body, decreased concentrations of nicotine can reduce the possible health risks, and people will be less vulnerable to nicotine addiction.

Another solution could be **governments and health organizations providing free smoking cessation interventions by giving out nicotine patches and therapy sessions**, which the patient will be strongly encouraged to go to until he/she quits smoking.

Questions A Resolution Must Answer

1. In what ways can UNODC put its power in use to prevent an increase in the number of adolescent use of e-cigarettes?
2. To what extent do UNODC and other agencies such as WHO and FDA have power over individual countries?
3. What are the possible limitations faced by an individual country in reducing adolescent use of e-cigarettes? How can they be eliminated?
4. How could the black markets selling illegal e-cigarettes be exterminated? Are anti-vaping laws or prohibitionist policies supporting the banning of e-cigarettes doing more harm than good?
5. In what ways can outbreaks like the 2019 outbreak of severe lung illness be diminished?

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