Electronic Cigarette Trajectories (The ECtra Study): Real world experiences of using e-cigarettes for avoiding relapse to smoking

Consumer experiences of quitting, switching, dual using, and ‘permissive lapse’ on the path to maintaining abstinence
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With thanks to Sarah Jakes and Dr Isabel Greaves

Competing interests - No tobacco industry, electronic cigarette company or pharmaceutical industry funding

@Addictionuea
Background – Smoking and Nicotine addiction

• Tobacco smoking remains the leading preventable cause of death worldwide (WHO, 2013; ASH, 2016).

• “Smokers smoke for the nicotine, but die from the tar” Professor Mike Russell, Maudsley Smokers Clinic, 1979.

• In the UK, NHS stop smoking services effective at supporting motivated people to quit.

• Many quit attempts in the general population are ‘unaided’.

• E cigarettes now the most popular quitting method (STS, April 2017)

• Although many smokers quit, relapse is very common, suggesting that: “tobacco dependence…might be better viewed as a chronic disorder, requiring repeated episodes of treatment” (Etter & Stapleton, 2006).
Why is continued abstinence from smoking so difficult?

- Physical dimension – Nicotine addiction, ‘benefits’ of smoking (appetite and weight control)
- Psychological dimension – Beliefs about use and function of smoking (stress, anxiety)
- Social dimension – smoking as a group behaviour, association of smoking with particular environments, cues/associative learning
- Cultural dimension – smoking norms
- **Identity** – as a concept intersects psychological, social and cultural dimensions
Cessation and relapse prevention – the options for support

- Cold turkey
- Alternative therapies (e.g. hypnotherapy)
- Pharmacological therapies
- Psychological therapies
- Combined pharmacological and psychological therapy - the ‘gold standard’

The problem for relapse prevention is the inability of any of these methods to address all of the dimensions of smoking behaviour simultaneously
Electronic cigarettes: a consumer product and a ‘disruptive technology’ – an opportunity for relapse prevention

1st Gen. Cig-a-like

2nd Gen. Vape pen

3rd Gen. Mod & Tank

GFN 15th June 2017
Background - Qualitative studies

Perceptions towards electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation among Stop Smoking Service users

Frances C. Sherratt, Lisa Newson, Michael W. Marcus, John K. Field and Jude Robinson

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health

How and Why Do Smokers Start Using E-Cigarettes? Qualitative Study of Vapers in London, UK

Elle Wadsworth, Joanne Neale, Ann McNeill and Sara C. Hitchman

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Contexts of cigarette and e-cigarette use among dual users: a qualitative study

Pallavi Pokhrel, Thaddeus A. Herzog, Nicholas Munafaka, Sakshi Regmi and Pebbles Fagan

Perceived efficacy of e-cigarettes versus nicotine replacement therapy among successful e-cigarette users: a qualitative approach

Amanda M Barbeau, Jennifer Burda and Michael Siegel

Social Science & Medicine

Everyday tactics in local moral worlds: E-cigarette practices in a working-class area of the UK

Frances Thirlway
Real world experiences of using e-cigarettes for avoiding relapse to smoking - the ECtra Study

- Exploring in-depth participant perspectives on patterns of e-cigarette use over time in the context of smoking cessation or relapse.
- Qualitative study initially purposefully recruiting from a larger longitudinal survey.
- Adverts, snowballing
- Interviews
- Additional online interview.
- Photo elicitation to explore patterns of use
- Thematic analysis
Interview design

Initiating smoking
Smoking history including any quit attempts

Awareness of e-cigs
Starting e-cig
Changes over time
Current e-cig use
Future e-cig use

Routines
Support
Relationships
Rituals
Health beliefs
Professionals
Satisfaction
Stigma
Identity

Relapse
Heat-not-burn
Advice
Regulation

Photo elicitation

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Sample

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* Sampling frame target number based on profile of people who tried to quit smoking in the last year (Smoking Toolkit Study data, UCL, November 2016)
Emergent findings - pathways

Tobacco Smoking History
- Started smoking (n=40)
  - Desire/motivation to give up smoking: Various quit attempts with/without support 33
  - Limited desire/motivation to give up smoking: No serious quit attempts 7

Initiating and Continuing Vaping
- Started using e-cigarettes 40
  - First device limited or inadequate (low power, keeps breaking) 35
  - Full release 36

Subsequent devices better at meeting needs 35

Current Tobacco Smoking/Vaping Status
- Abstinent from tobacco (vaping) 19
  - Permissive tobacco lapses (vaping) 16
  - Dual use with reduced smoking (vaping) 1
  - Full relapse (no vaping) 1

Future Intentions
- Planning to stop (n=14)
  - Nicotine addiction resignation 5
  - Identification as 'vaper' 11
  - No plan to stop smoking 20
  - Plan to give up smoking using e-cig 3
Emergent findings – Quitting – cessation ‘revelations’

“having made the decision after one day I was just staggered at how easy it was, just staggered” [33F]. This participant quit after 40 years of being a smoker using an e-cigarette

“It’s hard to just give up really it’s stressful and you get, you know, anxiety and you’ve got a temper, it was, when I got my e-cig it was like magic because it was completely painless, it really was for me, it mightn’t be for everybody but I didn’t want a cigarette and I weren’t missing a cigarette and it was, I couldn’t believe it just how painless it was to just give up” [37M] 37M 67 year male participant
Emergent findings - switching

“when I first started with e-cigarettes, actually going to, then later on when I did start properly that was kind of the fill in for cigarettes and then it progressed into taking over from them” [34F]

“little ritual of rolling…rolling your cigarette well that’s why that takes over from it cos that’s like a ritual that, you build your, you know, your coils and all that, and you fill it up and, you know, unlike patches and things you’ve got the hand to mouth, and you’ve got smoke, well it’s like smoke, and it just completely replaces it” [37M 67 years, 44 years smoking]

“they’re the perfect replication of smoking nothing else gives you that, and if you’re like me and there is a lot of people like me enjoy smoking, the action of it the feel of it, it becomes, it’s important to you isn’t it, that feeling, and you enjoy it” [31F]
Example photo diary
Emergent findings – dual using

For some:

- Experimentation with different devices
- Periods of dual use with tobacco
- Search for a suitable product
- Experimentation with e liquids
- Trying different nicotine strengths – sufficient substitution needed to satisfy cravings
- No pressure on self to quit (fear of failing?)
- Many move to prefer vaping over smoking
Emergent findings – permissive lapse

“The only times I’ve had a cigarette are just social environment again, but I’ve only done it a handful of times, if that, and the great thing is when I have had one I haven’t even enjoyed it (ok wow), because it just doesn’t taste very nice, it makes you smell, and it’s not a particularly pleasant thing to be doing compared to vaporising, its just so much nicer.” [01M]

“I thought that after everything that I’d done that having a cigarette again I hated the taste I hated how I smelt just holding it” [36F] participant who had been abstinent one lapse due to stress
Emergent findings – pleasure

**Hit**

“the hit and the nicotine delivery and I think that’s what e-cigarettes do for me is that they do that they do those two things and if they do those two things I don’t need tobacco” [26M]

**Habit**

“I like the action of smoking at the end of the day that’s what it is I enjoy that that side of it and vaping gives me that it gives me that feeling of actually smoking” [31F- 34 year old female smoked 20 a day for 15 years.]

**Hobby**

“I think it’s the satisfaction of when I do build…I get the bigger clouds and I just it feels good the fact that I did that myself” [36 F- 21 year old female – started vaping because didn’t want to be smoking around her daughter but found the appeal a E-cigarettes greater than just the replacement of nicotine]

**Flavour**

“I had a cigarette and it was the most disgusting thing I’ve ever tasted…I’d got to the point where really, you know, just the whole flavour thing, it (the cigarette) just didn’t really do it” [15M 44 year old male, tobacco abstinent]

**Habitat**

“I mean the social side of it is a lot of it I mean I’ve met people I didn’t know before I’ve made so many very good friends” [37M 64 year old male]
Conclusions: Vaping for smoking relapse prevention

- E cigarettes are a ground-breaking consumer development – a ‘disruptive technology’ that have provided a new dimension to smoking cessation and now relapse prevention.
- Vaping meets the long term needs of ex-smokers by satisfying physical, psychological, social, cultural and identity related dimensions of addictive behaviour.
- Vaping can be incorporated easily into daily routines – substituting smoking patterns or allowing ‘little and often’ use to satisfy cravings.
- E cigarettes are pleasurable to use, encouraging long term use.
- Vaping may encourage those who never intended to quit to eventually quit (dual users?).
- Evidence of ‘permissive lapses’ that don’t necessarily slide towards full relapse.
- The potential of vaping perceived by many as ‘better than smoking’ suggests, for some populations at least, a real possibility of a tobacco free future.
References


Health and Social Care information Centre, NHS, June 2017. Statistics on smoking in England: NHS Digital


Thirlway, F (2016) Everyday tactics in local moral worlds: E-cigarette practices in a working-class area of the UK. Social Science & Medicine, 170, 106-113


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