

# **“It’s the first thing you think about when you wake up, and it’s the last thing you think about when you go to sleep”: Nicotine vaping among New Zealand adolescents**

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**Introduction:** Youth vaping has increased dramatically in recent years, prompting public health concern. This study explored what attracts adolescents to vaping, what deters those who do not vape, and how vaping affects the lives of adolescents who vape regularly.

**Method:** This qualitative study involved 64 participants aged 14-17 years, interviewed in friendship pairs with a subsequent individual in-depth interview. The data collected from these semi-structured interviews (June - Oct, 2022) was coded and analysed using general inductive analysis.

**Key Findings:** Many participants had never vaped, despite opportunities to do so. Those who refused typically saw vaping as ‘pointless’, ‘a waste of money’ and/or a risk to their health. Participants described vaping as highly normalised among adolescents, and many (including those who had never vaped) viewed the flavours and tricks as enticing. Thirteen students vaped nicotine monthly or more often, including ten who vaped daily. Vaping was initially motivated by curiosity, a desire to fit in, and/or the perception that vaping was ‘fun’ or ‘cool’. Most of those who vaped daily used disposable devices and reported vaping helped them cope with stress or anxiety. Nonetheless, daily use was associated with negative impacts on physical, relational and financial wellbeing, and some students showed clear signs of nicotine dependence.

**Discussion and Conclusions:** Daily nicotine vaping often has immediate negative impacts on adolescents, including rapid nicotine dependence. Despite vaping to cope with stress and anxiety, adolescents who vaped daily reported reduced wellbeing, suggesting those with pre-existing vulnerabilities may be disproportionately affected by vaping-related harm.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** NZ needs stronger measures to protect adolescents from nicotine dependence and address inequities. Measures could include increased enforcement of existing regulations, plain packaging, a ban on disposable vapes, and public education. Such education should explain that nicotine vaping is likely to exacerbate anxiety and depression.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

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