Social norms towards smoking and e-cigarettes among adult smokers in seven European countries: Findings from the EUREST-PLUS ITC Europe Surveys


Abstract

Introduction: This study explores whether current smokers’ social norms towards smoking and electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) vary across seven European countries alongside smoking and e-cigarette prevalence rates. At the time of surveying, England had the lowest current smoking prevalence and Greece the highest. Hungary, Romania and Spain had the lowest prevalence of any e-cigarette use and England the highest.

Methods: Respondents were adult (≥18 years) current smokers from the 2016 EUREST-PLUS ITC (Romania, Spain, Hungary, Poland, Greece, Germany) and ITC 4CV England Surveys (N=7779). Using logistic regression, associations between country and (a) smoking norms and (b) e-cigarette norms were assessed, adjusting for age, sex, income, education, smoking status, heaviness of smoking, and e-cigarette status.

Results: Compared with England, smoking norms were higher in all countries: reporting that at least three of five closest friends smoke (19% vs 65–84% [AOR=6.9–24.0; Hungary–Greece]), perceiving that people important to them approve of smoking (8% vs 14–57% [1.9–51.1; Spain–Hungary]), perceiving that the public approves of smoking (5% vs 6–37% [1.7–15.8; Spain–Hungary]), disagreeing that smokers are marginalised (9% vs 16–50% [2.3–12.3; Poland–Greece]) except in Hungary. Compared with England: reporting that at least one of five closest friends uses e-cigarettes was higher in Poland (28% vs 36% [2.7]) but lower in Spain and Romania (28% vs 6–14% [0.3–0.6]), perceiving that the public approves of e-cigarettes was higher in Poland, Hungary and Greece (32% vs 36–40% [1.5–1.6]) but lower in Spain and Romania in unadjusted analyses only (32% vs 24–26%), reporting seeing e-cigarette use in public at least some days was lower in all countries (81% vs 12–55% [0.1–0.4]; Spain–Greece).

Conclusions: Smokers from England had the least pro-smoking norms. Smokers from Spain had the least pro-e-cigarette norms. Friend smoking and disagreeing that smokers are marginalised broadly aligned with country-level current smoking rates. Seeing e-cigarette use in public broadly aligned with countrylevel any e-cigarette use. Generally, no other norms aligned with product prevalence.

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