

Reasons for initiation and regular use of heated tobacco products among current and former smokers in South Korea: Findings from the 2020 ITC Korea Survey

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Abstract

South Korea is the world's second-largest heated tobacco product (HTP) market after Japan. HTP sales in South Korea have increased rapidly since May 2017, accounting for 10.6% of the total tobacco market in 2020. Despite this, little is known as to why HTP consumers who were current and former smokers started using HTPs and used them regularly. We analyzed cross-sectional data for 1815 adults (aged 19+) who participated in the 2020 International Tobacco Control (ITC) Korea Survey, of whom 1650 were HTP-cigarette consumers (those who reported smoking cigarettes and using HTPs \geq weekly) and 165 were exclusive HTP consumers (using HTPs \geq weekly) who were former or occasional smokers (smoking cigarette < weekly). Respondents were asked to report the reason(s) they used HTPs, with 25 possible reasons for HTP-cigarette consumers and 22 for exclusive HTP consumers. The most common reasons for initiating HTP use among all HTP consumers were out of curiosity (58.9%), family and friends use HTPs (45.5%), and they like the HTP technology (35.9%). The most common reasons for regularly using HTPs among all HTP consumers were that they were less smelly than cigarettes (71.3%), HTPs are less harmful to own health than cigarettes (48.6%), and stress reduction (47.4%). Overall, 35.4% of HTP-cigarette consumers reported using HTPs to quit smoking, 14.7% to reduce smoking but not to quit, and 49.7% for other reasons besides quitting or reducing smoking. In conclusion, several common reasons for initiating and regularly using HTPs were endorsed by all HTP consumers who were smoking, had quit smoking completely, or occasionally smoked. Notably, only about one-third of HTP-cigarette consumers said they were using HTPs to quit smoking, suggesting that most had no intention of using HTPs as an aid to quit smoking in South Korea.

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