

Perceived relative harm of heated tobacco products (IQOS), e-cigarettes, and cigarettes among adults in Canada: Findings from the ITC Project

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Abstract

Introduction: Tobacco companies have introduced heated tobacco products (HTPs), such as IQOS, which may compete with e-cigarettes among smokers interested in switching to potentially reduced-risk products. Non-smokers may also start using IQOS if they believe this product is less harmful than other nicotine products. Smokers' and non-smokers' decisions may be driven by relative harm perceptions of emerging nicotine products. We aimed to examine relative harm perceptions between IQOS, e-cigarettes, and cigarettes, among nicotine product users and non-users. **Methods:** We conducted a web survey with Canadian respondents (aged $>/ 20$ years; n=268) in September-October 2018. Perceptions about relative harm between IQOS (available for sale since 2017 and subject to the same comprehensive marketing restrictions as cigarettes in Canada), e-cigarettes, and cigarettes, were assessed among non-users (n=79), exclusive smokers (n=78), exclusive e-cigarette users (n=32), and dual users (n=79). Multiple logistic regression explored the association between relative harm perceptions and nicotine-use status, adjusting for sociodemographic variables. **Results:** Over half of respondents perceived IQOS as equally or more harmful than e-cigarettes (53.7%), while almost a quarter either reported IQOS as less harmful than e-cigarettes or were uncertain (22.7% and 23.5%, respectively). Two-thirds of respondents (65.7%) perceived e-cigarettes as less harmful than cigarettes, yet only half (48.1%) perceived IQOS as less harmful than cigarettes. Both exclusive and dual e-cigarette users, but not exclusive smokers, had higher odds of perceiving IQOS as more harmful than e-cigarettes and less harmful than cigarettes compared to non-users. **Conclusions:** Most nicotine users and non-users perceive differential health risk across IQOS, e-cigarettes, and cigarettes. Although e-cigarettes are generally viewed as less harmful than cigarettes, the perceived harm of IQOS was unclear.

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