Do smokers’ perceptions of the harmfulness of nicotine replacement therapy and nicotine vaping products as compared to cigarettes influence their use as an aid for smoking cessation? Findings from the ITC Four Country Smoking and Vaping Surveys


Abstract
Aim: This study examined whether smokers’ harm perceptions of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) and nicotine vaping products (NVPs) relative to cigarettes predicted their subsequent use as smoking cessation aids during their last quit attempt (LQA).

Methods: We analyzed data from 1,315 current daily smokers (10+ cigarettes per day) who were recruited at Wave 1 (2016), and who reported making a quit attempt by Wave 2 (2018) of the International Tobacco Control Four Country Smoking and Vaping Surveys in Australia, Canada, England, and the US. We used multinomial logistic regression models to examine prospective associations between harm perceptions of a) NRT and b) NVPs and their use at LQA, controlling for socio-demographic and other potential confounders.

Results: Smokers who perceive that a) NRT and b) NVPs are much less harmful than cigarettes were more likely to subsequently use the respective product as an aid than using no aid or other aids during LQA (adjusted relative risk ratio [aRRR]=3.79, 95%CI=2.16-6.66; and aRRR=2.11, 95%CI=1.29-3.45, respectively) compared to smokers who perceive these products as equally or more harmful. Additionally, those who perceive NVPs as much less harmful than cigarettes were less likely to use NRT as a quit aid (aRRR=0.34, 95%CI=0.20-0.60). No country variations for these associations were found.

Conclusion: This study found that smokers’ perceptions of the harmfulness of a) NRT and b) NVPs relative to cigarettes predicted the respective product use when trying to quit smoking. Corrective education targeting misperceptions of nicotine products’ relative harmfulness may facilitate their use for smoking cessation.

Implications: What this study adds: Nicotine replacement therapy and nicotine vaping products are two commonly used smoking cessation aids. This study demonstrates that misperceptions of the harms of nicotine products relative to cigarettes influence their use for smoking cessation. Believing that nicotine vaping products are much less harmful than cigarette smoking may lead some smokers to prefer these products over nicotine replacement therapy to aid smoking cessation. Education targeting misperceptions of nicotine products' harmfulness relative to cigarettes may enable smokers to make informed choices about which are appropriate to aid smoking cessation.

Recommended Citation