

Capturing changes in youth tobacco and nicotine use - a new composite measure

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Type selection

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Domain: Youth Engagement and Tobacco Control

Research Abstract Text

Background: The tobacco control landscape is rapidly evolving, particularly among young people. The tobacco industry drives this shift through complementary strategies of consolidation, and further development and promotion of emerging nicotine delivery products including e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products (HTPs), and oral nicotine. While declining youth smoking rates have led to a focus on e-cigarettes, other alternatives receive less attention. This study examines 1. prevalence of individual tobacco/nicotine product use and 2. composite tobacco/nicotine use among teenagers in Ireland.

Methods: Our sample comprised a nationally representative, stratified random school sample of 5,045 15- to 18-year-olds from 268 classes. Data were collected online in 2024. Analyses were performed using SPSS v27.

Results: We measured ever and current (past 30-day) use of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, water pipes, moist snuff, HTPs, and nicotine pouches. We computed a composite measure for the prevalence of "any tobacco/nicotine product use". Examining ever and current use, e-cigarette use was most prevalent at 39% (n=1,964) and 20.2% (n=1,016) respectively, followed by smoking at 30.4% (n=1,535) and 13.6% (n=684), moist snuff at 13.1% (n=646) and 5.8% (n=288), nicotine pouches at 8.9% (n=438) and 4.7% (n=230), HTPs at 7.5% (n=371) and 2.6% (n=131), and water pipes at 4.5% (n=227) and 0.8% (n=39). Using the composite measure, prevalence of any tobacco/nicotine product use was 43.3% (n=2,186) and 24.2% (n=1,219) for ever and current use, respectively.

Conclusions: The diversification of tobacco/nicotine products may disproportionately affect teenagers, with over 40% having used at least one product and 24% reporting current use. A focus on declining smoking rates may obscure the broader prevalence of tobacco/nicotine consumption. We propose the adoption of a comprehensive composite measure for tobacco and nicotine use, supported by standardized data collection and reporting frameworks. This approach would reduce fragmented, product-specific reporting and enable a more holistic assessment of the use of all tobacco and nicotine products.

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