

RUNNING HEAD: ATTITUDES TOWARD E-CIGARETTES IN PEOPLE WHO USE
DRUGS

Attitudes toward Electronic Cigarettes in an Australian Population of People who use Drugs

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Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the copyright Act 1968.

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Acknowledgement of Collaboration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has been done in collaboration with other researchers. I have included as part of this thesis a statement clearly outlining the extent of collaboration, with whom and under what auspices.

I contributed to the development of the research question, the database search, the statistical analysis, the interpretation of results and editing of the manuscript. Prof Billie Bonevski contributed to the development of the research question, design, the formulation of the methodology, the interpretation of results and editing of the manuscript. Ms Ashleigh Guillaumier assisted in data collection. Mr Nic Croce assisted with the statistical analysis.

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Abstract

Background: Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2015). The rates of smoking in Australia have been declining in recent years, but not in certain vulnerable populations such as people who use alcohol and other drugs. Smoking cessation strategies have been implemented on both a population and individual level. Smoking cessation strategies have been less successful in this group, and thus the need for new strategies has been recognised. Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) represent a potentially new smoking cessation aid, but little is known about this group's perception of e-cigarettes.

Method: A five-item survey was developed and administered to participants ($N= 405$) of six local drug and alcohol treatment centres in the Hunter New England local health district over a three month period in 2016-2017. The survey's questions assessed participants smoking status as well as their perceptions toward e-cigarettes generally, and their usefulness in smoking cessation.

Results: 86 percent of participants reported being current smokers of tobacco, with 56 percent reporting ever-use of e-cigarettes. 41 ($N=168$) percent of participants stated that they believed e-cigarettes are helpful as a smoking cessation strategy. 50 ($N=203$) percent of participants reported thinking that tobacco cigarettes were more harmful than e-cigarettes. 60 percent of participants ($N=243$) were of the opinion that e-cigarettes should be used in drug and alcohol clinics to help people quit smoking tobacco.

Using chi-square analysis to investigate associations, a person's smoking status was found to be significantly associated with e-cigarette use ($\chi^2 (8, N = 405) =20.16, p<0.05$), the persons perception of the helpfulness of e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation strategy ($\chi^2 (4, N = 405)$

=16.70, $p < 0.05$) and the persons perception of the harmfulness of e-cigarettes ($\chi^2 (6, N = 405) = 90.97, p < 0.001$)).

Conclusions: This may be the first study investigating attitudes toward e-cigarettes in an Australian population of people who use drugs. Results found that awareness and use of e-cigarettes was high, with over half (56 percent) of the sample reporting ever-use of e-cigarettes. Results also closely replicate findings of Stein et al. (2014) who found similar results in a North American sample of tobacco smokers accessing an opioid treatment program.

This research has implications for the legislative context around e-cigarettes in Australia. In summary, a sample of individuals from an at-risk population are currently using e-cigarettes in conjunction with tobacco cigarettes. Many report being interested in e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation strategy in drug and alcohol treatment centres. This warrants further exploration due to the current illegality of distribution of e-cigarettes in Australia. The strengths of this research are noted as the large sample-size and non-invasive nature of the survey. Limitations may include the generalisability of these findings to the larger population of people who use alcohol and other drugs.

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