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Electronic cigarette in Saudi Arabia: an online survey

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Background: E-cigarettes have been recently used to quit smoking. Their use became popular regardless of the fact that WHO considered them as a source of toxic fumes. Data about their safety is not yet confirmed, but major tobacco companies are advertising and producing them. Conducting clinical trials of these devices is challenging.

Purpose: To measure e-cigarette awareness in Saudi Arabia, and study their use among smokers and non-smokers.

Methodology: An electronic survey (Part of the validated WHO Global Adult Tobacco Survey) was used to reach participants through many internet communication applications. Microsoft Excel® was used to enter and analyze the data.

Results: 3027 participants were included in the analysis. Most of the participants were males (67.7%), aged between 18-40 years (73%), Saudi national (96 %), having a university degree (56.9%) and employed (56.9%). Awareness of e-cigarettes was high, as more than three quarters of respondents (82.5%) had heard about e-cigarettes. Less than half (42.5%) of those respondents who were aware of e- cigarettes have bought it or have seen anyone buying it. Among those respondents who were aware of e- cigarettes, one third (33.5%) had tried it. Of those who didn't ever smoke e-cigarettes, only (17.4%) were willing to try it in the current time. Less than one quarter of the respondents (22.3%) were smoking regular cigarettes. Of those, around two thirds (62.9%) were trying to quit smoking regular cigarettes, and among those, only (18.2%) were using e-cigarettes to help them do so. Only (8.8%) of the respondents believed that e-cigarettes is not harmful.

Conclusion: Smoking e-cigarettes is popular in Saudi Arabia, especially in non-smokers. Such popularity may “re-normalize” smoking, and lead to an increase in an “already alarming” smoking prevalence and addiction, especially to youngsters or at least a slowing down of the rate of decline.