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Electronic cigarettes in Russia: time for an action. Results from Russian Tobacco Control policy evaluation survey

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Topic(s):
Tobacco

Citation:
Electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) or e-cigarettes (e-cigs) become more and more popular in Russia, due to aggressive marketing, and yet are not regulated under the Russian Tobacco Control Law. Still very little is known about exposure of people to these products in Russia.

Aim. To assess the exposure of population to ENDS as well as the exposure of population to advertisement, promotion of ENDS in Russia, and its attitudes and beliefs regarding these products.

Methods. Data from Russian Tobacco Control Law Evaluation Survey (June – August 2017) are analysed. 11699 randomly selected respondents from 4320 households in 5 Russian Subjects were interviewed and a stratified sample (n=5289 aged=18 years) of smokers (n=3228), former smokers (n=1012) and never smokers (n=1049) participated in the survey.

Results. 34% of the respondents were familiar with ENDS; 11.9% had tried e-cigs, 25.8% of those were regular users. 69.2% of cigarette smokers said they hadn’t reduce the amount of smoked tobacco while using e-cigarettes. 44.4% had made a quit attempt by means of e-cigarettes: of those 65.2% failed to quit smoking, and 75.3% could not quit neither smoking nor e-cigarettes in a long term. Only 18.7% ENDS users agreed that e-cigarettes cause addiction, 35.8% were not sure, and 45.5% even denied the fact. Those were mostly the youngest respondents aged 18-24 years (52.3%), among all age groups (p<.05).

Vaping was not allowed in the household of 70% respondents. Mostly vaping was allowed at home of the current tobacco smokers (21.8%), compared to quitters (p<.05) and in the youngest age group 18-24 (28%) (p<.05). 90.3% said that vaping was not allowed at their workplace. However 64% had seen people vaping e-cigs in public places where smoking is banned, 27.1% had witnessed vaping in restaurants and bars, 59.8% had been exposed to vaping in public places and 45.9% of those had found it annoying.

In the past 6 month 19.6% of the respondents were exposed to promotion of ENDS via internet, 18.4% - at the points of sale, 18.1% - via social networks. The other sources of advertisement had lesser contribution in marketing and promotion of ENDS. Exposure of the youngest age group (18-24) to e-cigs promotion was 2-3 times higher compared to the other age groups – via all sources (p<.0001).

61% of respondents believed that the second hand vape of e-cigarettes is harmful for the bystanders. Majority agreed that is necessary to regulate allowed amounts of the nicotine in e-liquids (65.4%), ban the aromatic supplements (56.5%), ban vaping in public places where tobacco smoking is banned (70.6%), ban the sales of these products to minors (82%), and the use of e-cigarettes by those(83.7%). 77.6% support the need for ban of all forms of advertisement, marketing and promotion of ENDS.

Conclusion. These findings are used to support strong legislation to regulate ENDS in Russia, which is crucial for the achievements of tobacco control policy.
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