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The Impact of Vaping

Today's teens face peer pressure to vape in ways that older generations may not fully understand. While previous generations dealt with peer pressure in the form of smoking cigarettes, the situation for today's youth is different. Older adults, particularly those born in the 60s, may recall stories like, "Our parents smoked everywhere, in the living room, at the dinner table, and even in the bedroom. Smoking was just part of life." There was little consideration for the harmful effects of secondhand smoke on children. Fast-forward to teens who grew up with parents born in the 90s. These parents may describe how "When I was a teenager, smoking wasn't cool. If you smoked, you were often left out or ostracized because no one wanted the smell of cigarettes." This shift in societal attitudes about smoking has led to a significant change in how today's teens are exposed to nicotine.

However, a new generational shift has emerged with the rise of e-cigarettes. The development of vaping devices, especially those with enticing flavors and scentless vapor, has led many young teens to indulge in the very habit their parents' generation fought to leave behind. As vaping has exploded in popularity, particularly among teenagers and young adults, it is crucial to examine its impact on physical and mental health.

The rise of vaping

Vaping's rapid rise is attributed mainly to social influences, targeted marketing, and perceived harmlessness. These electronic devices, known as e-cigarettes or vapes, deliver flavored vapor, often containing nicotine, and have entirely changed how nicotine is consumed. Investigating the increasing popularity of vaping, along with the social pressures, psychological effects, and health risks it poses to youth, reveals the detrimental consequences of this seemingly innocuous trend (Becker). Vaping has blown up over the past few years, especially with teenagers and young adults. Vaping's increase in popularity is linked to social influences, targeted marketing, and its perceived harmlessness. Vaping involves using electronic devices to inhale flavored vapor, which often contains nicotine. These devices, called e-cigarettes or vapes, have transformed how nicotine is consumed. An examination of the increasing popularity, social influences, psychological effects, and health risks of vaping on youth reveals the detrimental impact this seemingly innocent act has on young people (Becker).

Vaping began in the early 2000s and changed the way people think about smoking. It was created by a Chinese pharmacist named Hon Lik, who invented the first e-cigarette. This new device was intended to help people quit smoking by providing nicotine without the harmful effects of traditional cigarettes. Instead of burning tobacco, e-cigarettes use a liquid that is turned into vapor, giving smokers a potentially less dangerous way to satisfy their cravings. Vaping represents a modern approach to using nicotine that many people find appealing. The origins of vaping trace back to the early 2000s, when Chinese pharmacist Hon Lik created the first e-cigarette as a tool to help smokers quit. The initial goal was to provide an alternative to traditional cigarettes, delivering nicotine without the harmful byproducts of combustion. At first,

these devices weren't widely used, and their appeal was limited to people who wanted to quit smoking. However, that changed when companies started introducing appealing designs and enticing flavors. The shift from medical aid to a consumer product was driven by marketing strategies aimed at making vaping more attractive, especially to young people. Instead of just marketing to smokers trying to quit, they expanded their audience by making vaping look modern, convenient, and more enjoyable.

Marketing and Social Media Influence

To boost sales, companies began advertising vaping as a safer alternative to smoking. They developed fruity and dessert flavors that appealed to younger audiences and introduced features like touchscreen vapes to make the devices feel more high-tech and stylish. In addition, social media played a massive part in making vaping trendy. Influencers, celebrities, and even everyday users posted pictures and videos of themselves vaping, making it seem fun, harmless, and socially acceptable. Over time, vaping became less associated with quitting smoking and more with an incredible, effortless lifestyle (Becker). As a result, vaping has become increasingly common among teenagers. Studies show that a significant percentage of middle and high school students have either tried vaping or use e-cigarettes regularly, often starting at a young age. The pressure to fit in or appear more mature is a high motivator, pushing teens to try vaping. Once they begin, quitting can be incredibly difficult (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*).

Vaping is often viewed as a group activity, where peer pressure plays a prominent role in maintaining the behavior. The presence of friends or classmates who vape makes it seem normal, even expected, further contributing to the normalization of the habit. Social media also amplifies

this issue, with companies using trendy ads, viral hashtags, and influencer marketing to make vaping appear fun and harmless. Bright packaging, sweet flavors, and catchy product names are designed to appeal to young people, which downplays the potential health risks and focuses on the enjoyment and social aspects of vaping. These marketing tactics, combined with the ease of access and social validation that vaping offers have made it not just a habit but a social identity for many teenagers (*University of York*).

Health Risks and Psychological Effects

The rapidly growing vaping culture in teens raises serious concerns, especially since many don't realize the health risks involved. While it's often seen as a harmless habit, vaping can lead to nicotine addiction, lung damage, and other long-term effects. The mix of targeted marketing, social media influence, and peer pressure has made vaping seem like a casual, everyday activity rather than the serious health risk it is. Addressing this issue requires more awareness, stricter regulations, and honest conversations about the real dangers of vaping, especially for young people who are most at risk (*National Institutes of Health*).

The psychological effects of vaping are concerning, especially as vaping continues to rise in popularity among adults and teenagers. Vaping has been shown to lead to addiction, which significantly impacts an individual's mental health. The nicotine found in e-cigarettes is highly addictive and can have long-lasting consequences on the brain, particularly in youth whose brains are still developing. This addiction can alter a person's mental state, creating long-lasting effects such as increased anxiety, stress, and even depression, especially in impressionable youth. This addiction can alter a person's mental state, creating long-lasting psychological consequences. The effects of vaping's addictive nature and its impact during a critical stage of

development pose severe risks for young people, making them more susceptible to relying on vaping as a coping mechanism (*American Heart Association*).

Prevention and Intervention

As the vaping epidemic continues to affect youth, it is important to focus on providing resources for prevention and intervention. Schools, communities, and families need to play a proactive role in educating youth about the dangers of vaping. Programs emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and decision-making can help teens better understand the risks and resist vaping pressures. Additionally, providing access to mental health support and counseling for those struggling with nicotine addiction is essential. These services can help adolescents develop healthier coping strategies, manage stress and anxiety, and address any fundamental mental health concerns (*Government of the United Kingdom*).

Furthermore, encouraging teens to participate in extracurricular activities or volunteer work can reduce the likelihood of vaping by offering them positive social connections and meaningful ways to cope with stress. Collaboration between schools, parents, and public health organizations is key to creating an environment that supports healthy choices and reduces the usage of vaping among youth. By creating and supporting a culture of awareness, prevention, and support, people can weaken the long-term impacts of vaping on the next generation. It is necessary to investigate healthier habits that could replace vaping. Studies have shown that physical exercise, mindfulness practices, and hobbies like painting or playing an instrument can help teens reduce their desire to vape. Exercise, especially team sports or individual activities like running or yoga, can help beat stress and anxiety, which are often triggers for vaping. Not only does it help teens release built-up tension, but it also boosts their mood by releasing

endorphins, which can improve overall mental health.

Practicing these alternatives can provide healthier coping mechanisms for teens. It can offer a natural way to beat the pressures that lead to vaping. Exercise and mindfulness practices, such as meditation or deep breath exercises, can help teens become more aware of their stressors and manage their emotions more healthily, rather than turning to vaping for temporary relief. Creative hobbies like painting, writing, or playing an instrument can give teens a productive outlet to express their feelings and keep their minds occupied. These activities not only offer a distraction from vaping but can also help **build** confidence and resilience, giving teens the tools to resist peer pressure and better handle their challenges (“Influencers to Educate Youth”).

Physical effects of vaping

Even in other countries, the risks of vaping are being studied. A study in Northern Thailand found that youth who used e-cigarettes or smoked both cigarettes and e-cigarettes had significantly higher odds of experiencing anxiety and depression. Specifically, e-cigarette users had a 1.80 times higher likelihood of depression and anxiety, while dual users had an even greater risk, with 2.3 times higher odds for depression (Phetphum, Chutinun, Prajongjeep, et al.). The health risks of vaping are also significant. In the short term, it can cause lung irritation, coughing, and breathing issues, along with nicotine addiction, which makes quitting difficult. Long-term effects are still being studied, but early research suggests links to lung diseases, heart problems, and other severe health conditions. While vaping might seem safer than traditional smoking, it exposes users to harmful chemicals, including heavy metals and high doses of nicotine, which can cause severe addiction (“Can My Lungs Heal After Vaping?”).

Public responses to vaping

Governments and public health organizations have taken measures to address the growing concerns about youth vaping. Regulatory actions, such as age restrictions, bans on flavored e-cigarettes, and limitations on marketing practices, aim to reduce youth access to these products. For instance, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has expanded “The Real Cost” public education campaign to educate youth about the adverse health effects and risks of vaping and smoking. Public health campaigns use multiple platforms, including school programs, social media, and advertisements, to inform teenagers about the dangers associated with vaping. They seek to decrease the popularity of e-cigarettes among young people. Research indicates that such campaigns can effectively influence adolescents’ beliefs and perceptions about the harms of using e-cigarettes (“UK to Probe Health Impact of Vaping”).

In addition to this, local and state policies have been passed to protect youth from the dangers of vaping further. Criteria such as clean indoor air policies, minimum legal sale age laws, taxes, and retail sales licensing aim to reduce youth exposure to vaping-related risks. Given these concerns, continuing research and developing policies to reduce youth vaping is crucial. This includes providing stricter regulations on the marketing and sale of e-cigarettes, especially those with appealing flavors, and regulating public health campaigns to educate young people about the dangers of vaping (Becker).

Gateway to Other Substance Use and Addiction

Vaping may also pave the way for other forms of drugs. The normalization of nicotine through e-cigarettes can make people feel comfortable experimenting with other addictive substances, such as traditional cigarettes, alcohol, or even illicit drugs. With tempting flavors and discreet designs, vaping can make nicotine use appear harmless and socially acceptable,

potentially encouraging teens to try other substances as they become desensitized to the risks of addiction. The connection between vaping and other substance use shows how vaping can be part of a more prominent pattern of risky behavior in teens. Understanding this gateway effect is vital for creating strategies to prevent and address not just vaping (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*).

Environmental Consequences of Disposable Vapes

Disposable vapes pose a significant threat to the environment due to their plastic waste, lithium batteries, and toxic chemicals. These devices are designed for short-term use and are often not adequately recycled, contributing to the growing problem of electronic waste. The lithium-ion batteries inside vapes can leak harmful chemicals into the soil and water. This creates risks to wildlife and ecosystems. The plastic and metal components also take years to break down, further polluting the environment. With millions of disposable vapes being discarded each year, their environmental impact continues to grow, making it crucial to address proper disposal methods and promote more sustainable alternatives.

The way disposable vapes are thrown away also creates problems for specific communities. People in low-income areas often don't have sound waste systems and are more likely to deal with vape waste. This can make pollution worse and harm the health of people living there. The problem is also spreading to other countries, especially ones that don't have strong recycling systems. Sometimes, these countries get dumped electronic waste, including vapes, which makes regulating even worse. When vapes are not thrown away correctly, they can release harmful chemicals into the air, which hurts everyone nearby. To fix this, laws need to change to make sure vapes are made and thrown away more safely ("Vape Tongue" Cases on

Steep Rise”).

Economic Impact of Vaping

The rise of vaping also has had economic consequences, mainly on healthcare systems. As more teenagers and young adults become addicted to nicotine, there will be more demand for medical treatments related to vaping-related illnesses. The long-term health effects of vaping, like respiratory diseases, heart conditions, and mental health issues, are expected to have a significant financial burden on healthcare providers. Hospitals and clinics have seen a rise in patients with chronic lung diseases, asthma, and addiction-type mental health disorders, all of which require costly treatments. Also, the cost of nicotine addiction treatment, including counseling, therapy, and nicotine replacement therapies, can be a heavy financial burden on individuals and society as a whole. Public health organizations may also face increasing pressure to fund anti-vaping campaigns and provide resources for prevention and education. If these costs continue to rise, the economic impact of vaping will most likely become a serious area of focus for policymakers and healthcare professionals (“E-Cigarette Users ‘Will Be Horrified to Know’”).

Conclusion

In conclusion, vaping causes significant threats to the health and well-being of people, especially the youth. The combination of targeted advertising, peer pressure, and its addictive nature creates a dangerous cycle, leading to mental and physical health issues. Addressing this issue requires significant efforts from public health campaigns, government regulations, and increased awareness among young people (*Newsroom*).

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