

Review of: "Randomized Experimental Test of a Reduced-Exposure Message for an E-cigarette: Comprehension and Related Misperceptions"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

1. The article on 'Randomised Experimental Trial of a Reduced-exposure message for an E – cigarette comprehension and related misperceptions' was read with interest. The authors have emphasised the importance of correct communication regarding the use of ENDS as a safer alternative to tobacco smoking, without in any way belittling the cautionary input regarding its negative aspects. Few observations are brought out here:

A. It is well-understood that primarily the smokers ought to be made aware of the harmful effects of smoking tobacco or even ENDS. This should be mentioned in the introduction to the manuscript. The manuscript seems to emphasise that only switching to ENDS as the alternative to smoking tobacco is incorrect. The manuscript also does not mention or take into account the prior knowledge of participants regarding ENDS.

B. The research ultimately attempts to create a behaviour change among the participants. Hence the reason why it was exempt from IRB is not understood.

C. According to the declaration by the authors, there was a programming error during recruitment, which should have an impact on the differences in the ability of comprehension among different sub-groups of participants. Non-users being the largest sub-group may have many participants who have never smoked and would not be able to comprehend the importance of switching to ENDS, especially if they are from low literacy levels.

D. Table II depicts that the target audience has been wrongly selected – selection bias; which may impact the findings. The proportion of non-users (+ former users) in comparison to current smokers (and ENDS users) is in a ratio of 60:40. Ideally, the targeted audience should be the younger population who are smokers; however, here their number is lesser compared to older participants who were non-smokers. This would not elicit the expected behaviour change.

E. In Fig I, whereas comprehension of the action was shown to be high on average, a fairly large percentage of respondents, who were smokers and dual users, answered that to achieve exposure reduction, one needs to reduce cigarettes by half and use JUUL, whereas they should have stated that exposure to cigarette smoke should be removed entirely. This does not signify good comprehension, especially among these target groups with the most relevance.

F. Table III appears to have confirmed the perception of former + never users that the ENDS product was not at all harmful. This would likely be due either to incomplete knowledge or improper communication of the message and cannot be a successful message transmission.

G. Authors may consider a reduction in the number of Tables and make results and discussion simpler and with better flow rather than the current details.