

# Young people's experiences of youth vaping in their community

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## Summary

The study investigated how young people understand **vaping amongst their peers** in their community. The study was undertaken as part of a newly formed Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) in a local authority in the North of England. It was undertaken using a **co-produced model of qualitative research between local authority practitioners and embedded researchers** from the HDRC. Four focus groups with **17 young people aged between 13 and 23 years** were conducted between May and September 2024. **Emerging findings** suggest the importance of a number of factors including the role of **friendship groups, social media, mental well-being and family** in the prevalence of youth vaping, alongside the **accessibility and range** of vapes. Participants identified a **lack of clear information** and made important suggestions for support including **specialist advisors** within schools, **restrictions on accessibility and promotion**, and **further information** about health harms, the legal framework and financial costs.

## Background

The study was undertaken as part of the newly formed HDRC in Doncaster, a research collaboration between City of Doncaster Council, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield. The HDRC is an NIHR funded initiative to develop research curiosity and capability within local authorities to support decision-making on addressing health inequalities.

In recent years the use of electronic cigarettes has increased significantly by young people nationally (NHS 2022, ONS 2023). Practitioners in Doncaster public health team identified a need for information from local young people about their views and experiences of youth vaping to help shape effective plans for support. The study investigated the following research questions:

- 1) How do young people from across Doncaster perceive access to and use of electronic cigarettes by their peers?
- 2) What do young people know about electronic cigarettes and their impact?
- 3) What strategies do young people think would be most effective in supporting young people to understand the impact of the use of electronic cigarettes?

The study team is comprised of Public Health practitioners working alongside embedded researchers to conduct the research. The study commenced in November 2023 and is due to be completed in November 2024.

## Key learning

### Emerging findings

Emerging findings suggest the following are **important factors** in the prevalence of youth vaping:

- young people's networks of family and friends
- mental well-being
- broader social media
- accessibility
- range of products

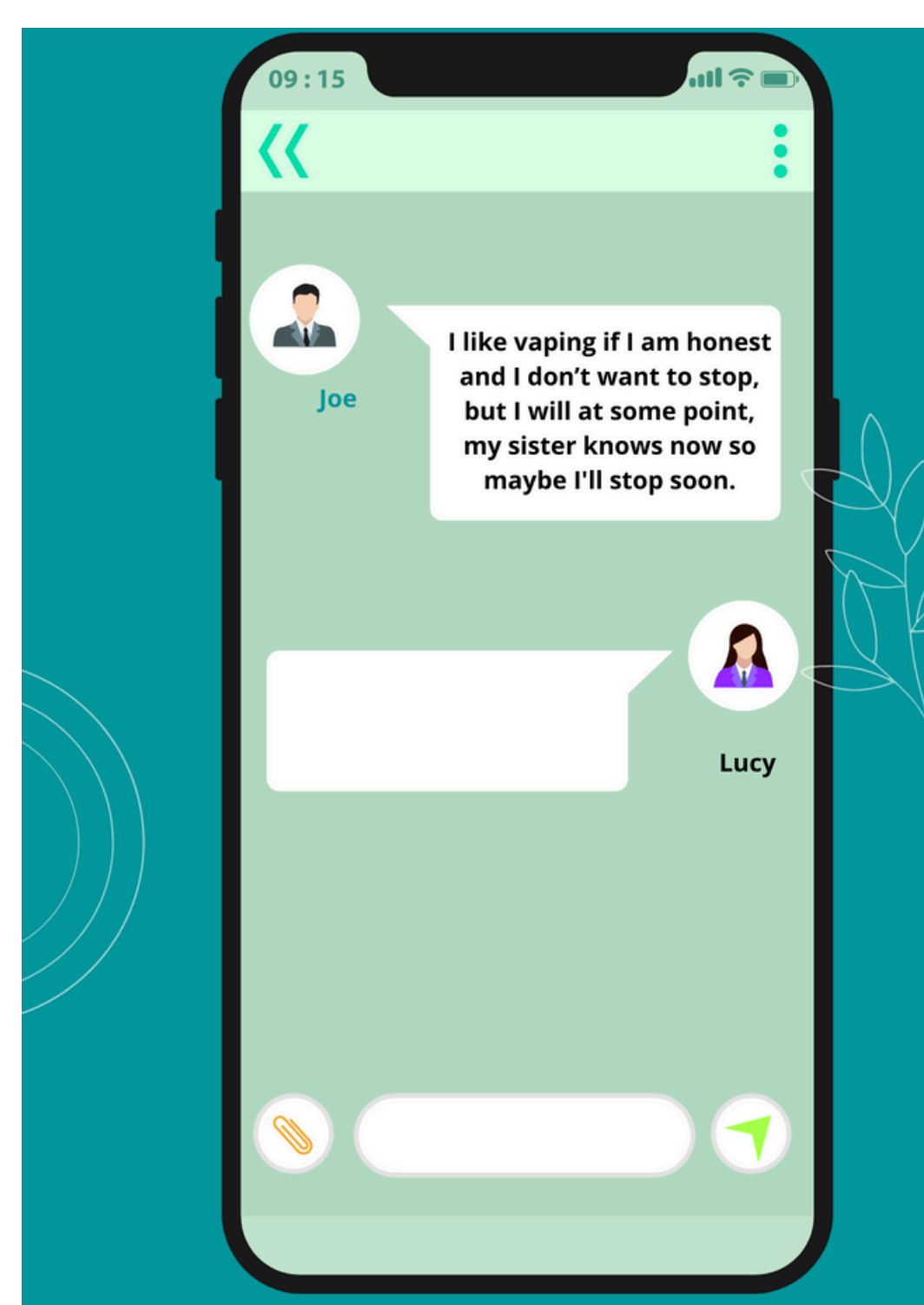
Young people also identified a **lack of clear information and guidance** about vapes with a **mixed understanding of the legal framework**.

Participants have also made important suggestions for areas for **future support**. These included:

- specialist advisors in schools
- restrictions on promoting vapes
- information about health harms and financial cost

### Learning from the process

The study team were new to working together on a collaborative local authority research project. We have been **'learning through doing'** sharing the planning and development as well as jointly conducting the focus groups and analysing data. This has entailed embedded researchers sharing in-depth knowledge about research processes, ethical procedures and research theory and Public health staff sharing practice based experience, knowledge and networks. At the end of the project we will be conducting a short review to; reflect on the process, develop our learning from the experience and share with others.



## Method

Four focus groups of young people were recruited to the study through existing youth settings outside of schools. Participants were **aged 13 to 23 years** (the majority of participants were between 13 and 15 years old). Participants were recruited to reflect a **diversity of backgrounds and experiences**, and particularly those where vaping has been found locally to be more prevalent. Groups were visited prior to the research to build rapport and provide information prior to their participation. Information was produced in a **variety of formats** to facilitate greater accessibility including **age-appropriate study information sheets, translated materials** and a **video** version of the study information sheet.

A range of **creative tools** for use in the study were developed in consultation with groups of local young people and a group of adults who form a Public, Patient Involvement group at Sheffield Hallam University. The tools included **participatory activities and vignettes** (See examples in images above).

Data is currently being analysed thematically by the study team using Braun and Clarke's **reflexive thematic analysis** approach (2006).

## Next steps

The research team will be **jointly analysing** the data and producing draft findings to share with the young people who participated for their additional views.

We will **invite young people** to support the **design and production of outputs** from the study.

Further **co-produced recommendations for policy and practice** will be created by the study team and will be sharing the final study results in a range of **different formats**.



If you would like to find out more please get in touch.  
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