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Prevalence of electronic cigarette use among women of different age groups in the metropolitan region of São Paulo

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INTRODUCTION Smoking is a major cause of preventable morbidity and mortality. The emergence of electronic smoking devices presents new challenges. Initially marketed to assist in smoking cessation, many individuals initiated dual use or were introduced to addiction through them. Studies published in the Archives of Public Health and the American Journal of Health Promotion reported an increase in the prevalence of electronic cigarette use worldwide. However, research seeking to understand the prevalence of electronic cigarette use among women of different age groups, as well as the factors influencing this behavior, remains scarce. **METHODS** This is a descriptive, quantitative, and cross-sectional field study. The sample consisted of 200 women from the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, divided into two groups: 18 to 24 years old (97 participants) and over 25 years old (103 participants). Data were collected via an electronic form (WhatsApp, social networks, e-mail), targeting women who currently use or have used electronic cigarettes. Minors under 18 years old, residents of other regions, and non-users were excluded. **RESULTS** The prevalence was high: 148 reported exclusive use of electronic cigarettes, 42 exclusive use of conventional cigarettes (with a history of electronic cigarette use), and 10 dual use. Regarding initiation, 128 started with conventional cigarettes and 60 with electronic cigarettes. Peer influence was the main initiation factor (158), while stress (116) and social life (127) motivated continuation. Ease of use (149) and absence of odor (111) were the primary reasons for preference. The majority (179) demonstrated health concerns (effects on the skin, respiratory system), and 176 expressed a desire to quit the habit. **DISCUSSION** The results confirm the importance of social influences in initiation and the transition to psychological factors in maintaining use. The preference for electronic cigarettes is based on convenience and social acceptance. There is a conflict between high risk awareness and persistence of use, possibly linked to addiction and short-term perceived benefits. **CONCLUSION** The use of electronic cigarettes among women is driven by social factors and product characteristics. Despite continuous use, there is a strong intention to quit and health concerns, indicating the need for public policies and prevention and cessation strategies focused on community and behavioral approaches.

KEYWORDS: Electronic cigarette; Women; Tobacco use disorder; Public health.