

Perceptions of E-cigarette Flavors Among Filipino Youth

Background

In July 2022, the Philippines passed a bill to allow e-cigarette flavors that were previously banned, except those deemed “unduly appealing to youth.” We explored Filipino youth’s perceptions of e-cigarette flavor appeal and harm.

Methods

- In January 2024, we conducted 24 focus groups in Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City, stratified by age, gender, urban/rural location, and e-cigarette use status (current use vs. non-use)
- 171 youth, ages 13–20, were recruited via household visits
- Focus group participants discussed and compared various flavors and flavored products during discussions (*pictured below*)
- Discussions in Tagalog, Cebuano, or Bisaya were transcribed and translated
- Thematic analysis was performed



A broad range of non-tobacco flavors fuels e-cigarette appeal and reduced harm perceptions among Filipino youth



Results

Many viewed flavors as the most appealing aspect of e-cigarettes:

- Preferred flavors: fruit, sweets; some liked menthol or tobacco
- Likened to perfumes/air fresheners and used to mask meal aftertastes

Flavors shaped harm perceptions:

- “[The coconut melon flavor seems less harmful because] it is soft even though the nicotine is high”

Tobacco flavor was viewed as more harmful than non-tobacco flavors:

- Many disliked its taste, smell, and harshness, calling it “for old people”
- If tobacco were the only flavor available, most said they would quit or not buy/try e-cigarettes; a few said they would continue use because their body “will look for it”

Those who preferred tobacco flavor cited its strength, ability to mask aftertaste, and belief that it is more “natural” than non-tobacco flavors.

Conclusions

- E-cigarette flavors were notably appealing to Filipino youth, suggesting they could be considered “unduly appealing to youth” under current legal criteria
- To limit youth exposure to flavor-related e-cigarette marketing, precise regulatory language—*explicitly* restricting non-tobacco flavors—is needed

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A previous IGTC study examined how online marketing strategies are used to promote e-cigarettes in the Philippines

This work was supported with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use (bloomberg.org).

The work being presented has received funding or other means of support from any of the following sources:

Any of the authors have received funding (including consultancy) from any of the following sources in the past 5 years:

Competing Interests: Dr. Cohen was a paid consultant in litigation against a tobacco company.

	Tobacco industry	E-cigarette & nicotine product industry	Pharma industry
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