

## LETTER to the EDITOR

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# Smoke and Mirrors: Unmasking E-Cigarette Awareness Among Indian Youth

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### Dear Editor

We recently reviewed the article titled “Awareness and Use of E-cigarettes among Adolescents and Their Adult Caregivers in Two Cities of India,” by Gupta and colleagues. (Gupta et al., 2023). The study aims to provide insights into the awareness and utilization of e-cigarettes among adolescents and their adult caregivers, a topic of growing significance. We commend the authors for their dedication to exploring this matter; however, our review has unveiled several noteworthy concerns that warrant attention to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding.

Firstly, the article relies heavily on self-reported data obtained through surveys. While surveys are a common method for collecting data on public health behaviours, they are prone to recall bias and misreporting. Adolescents and their caregivers might not accurately remember or disclose their exposure to e-cigarette marketing messages or their use patterns. Additionally, the authors mention that the adolescents’ caregivers were mostly mothers (>80%), which could introduce a gender bias into the study, as it is known that both e-cigarette marketing and usage patterns can differ between genders. Understanding the marketing strategies employed by e-cigarette companies can provide us with valuable insights formulating policies in order to curtail smoking habit.

Furthermore, the article does not delve into the specific sources and content of e-cigarette marketing messages that reached adolescents and adult caregivers. It would be beneficial to analyse the nature of these messages, including their emphasis on potential harm reduction and the appeal to younger audiences. Such analysis would provide a clearer understanding of the marketing tactics employed by the e-cigarette industry and their potential influence on adolescents.

The article’s assertion that India’s e-cigarettes prohibition has prevented increased availability and use among adolescents is based on indirect assumptions and ambiguous notions given how popular and widely available such substances are on the illegal market. A more rigorous approach would involve a comparative analysis of data collected before and after the ban, which could provide more concrete evidence of the ban’s impact on e-cigarette awareness and usage trends among adolescents and caregivers.

The study’s limitation to two specific cities—Mumbai

and Kolkata may restrict the generalizability of the findings to a broader Indian context. India is characterized by diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and regional variations that could influence e-cigarette awareness and usage patterns differently across different regions. Therefore, the study’s scope should be expanded to include a more diverse set of cities and regions to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the situation.

In addition to the aforementioned considerations, it might be prudent to examine the potential economic repercussions of legalizing e-cigarettes in India. For instance, studies from regions like the United Kingdom, which have embraced e-cigarettes as a tobacco harm reduction tool, are also subsidizing such products as medicinal and have shown potential economic benefits through reduced healthcare costs associated with smoking-related illnesses (Campus et al., 2021, Institute for Global Tobacco Control, 2020). Analysing the potential revenue from the legal sale of e-cigarettes could be insightful, considering the current economic landscape and the government’s efforts to enhance revenue streams.

In conclusion, while the article contributes valuable information to the discourse on e-cigarette awareness and usage among adolescents and their adult caregivers, it is important to address the aforementioned concerns to ensure a more robust and accurate representation of the subject matter. We would recommend further research with a larger and more diverse sample, a longitudinal design to assess the impact of the ban over time, and a qualitative analysis of e-cigarette marketing messages to better understand their influence on adolescents.

### Author Contribution Statement

All authors have contributed significantly.

### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

### References

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