

# Vaping and Mental Health Among Teenagers: When Two Worlds Collide

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## ABSTRACT

As the rates of vaping among teenagers arise, the challenge of finding solutions to resolve early addictions and unhealthy habits has become increasingly prevalent. Alongside this new rise of teenagers vaping, mental illnesses have begun to become more prevalent in the most recent generations, and vaping could be potentially used as a coping mechanism. Finding reformed solutions to an ongoing epidemic will help agencies understand and know how to positively contribute and impact the mental health of teenagers. Continuing to utilize an outdated outreach method urging people to quit vaping eventually begins to lose validity and relatability to the target demographic. When pushing for reform in advocacy, it increases the possibility of resonating with teenagers than did prior.

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The epidemic of teenagers vaping has swept the nation by storm. The newly profound interest has steadily branched off from adults and has slowly gravitated to teenagers and has been a prevalent problem in North America. Agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have attempted to help bring awareness of the dangers of smoking along with other companies creating commercials presenting what is inside e-cigarettes that are harmful for an adolescent's body. However, regardless of the countless amounts of attempted outreaches made, vaping rates in teenagers have only increased and continues to increase across the nation (NIH, 2020).

As research continues to be made about the increase of teenage vaping rates, the normalization of vaping has also imprinted itself onto teenage culture. This new normalization arguably could have been through the advertising made by vaping companies to appeal to kids due to certain marketing strategies. This singular influence however is not the only critical factor in deducing what could have influenced the influx of teenagers to begin vaping in the more recent years but more as a coping mechanism for the ever-changing environment of the world.

Through recent years, the mental health of teenagers has become more prevalent than other generations. As presented from the World Health Organization (WHO), fourteen percent of ten-to-nineteen-year old's globally have at least one mental health disorder (WHO, 2022); along with the Office of Population Affairs which presented that thirty-two percent of thirteen-to-eighteen-year old's have experienced anxiety which has steadily been increasing by twenty-five since as recent as 2020 (WHO, 2022).

With more prevalence in racial injustices, staying more indoors and isolated from other people due to Covid-19, and inflation on the rise are some environmental factors that arguably have been stressors in teenagers lives recently. As someone who is constantly surrounded by teenagers and is a teenager themselves, experiencing vast changes in my lifestyle and habits in a span of two years has been demanding to keep up with and the need for a moment of rest and a second to breath has been something that a lot of teenagers alongside myself have been wanting for a very long time.

As mentioned by smaller organizations, the increase of mental health issues and the increase of vaping in teenagers has simultaneously followed. These two epidemics have seemed to link themselves together though as a way of coping with unresolved emotions or to relax. Even though statistics present how the majority of individuals who do begin vaping as either an attempt to quit smoking or to feel the pleasurable hit of nicotine into their bodies, there is now a new statistic of people beginning to increase their need to vape to relieve stress and specially to cope. When surveying one thousand people between the ages of fifteen to twenty-four, eighty-one percent said they started vaping to decrease feelings of mental stress like anxiety. Even though studies have shown that nicotine does not decrease feelings of mental health issues, teenagers still continue to vape regardless (Truth Initiative, 2022).

If agencies like the CDC or the FDA want to still continue advocating for teenage vaping to decrease, there needs to be more focus on other perspectives on why people start vaping and a modernized approach to how experts present the harmful effects of vaping. When being shown identical vaping infographics and speakers the severity of their message begins to dilute because it does not resonate within teenagers. This in turn does not change the perspectives of teenagers and prevents feelings of urgency to quit nicotine.

For cases of vaping to decrease, more accessibility to resources like therapies, need to be available for all and connecting with teenagers through improved outreaches. Being able to access different forms of vaping and therapy resources will help teenagers who have been seeking to quit be fully capable of doing so even when surrounded by temptation from their peers. Alongside increased resources, connection with teenagers with more up to date presentations and having more perspective as to why teenagers continue to vape will help create more receptiveness to what experts are saying. Making small changes like having teenagers who successfully been able to quit share their story or having small group meetings or discussions about their current vaping habits, can foster a bettering environment of change.

As of now, a way to see promising results in decreasing vaping rates is better accessibility to mental health resources as a way to promote healthier outlets to mental health issues arising. Even though mental health resources are available at schools like guidance counselors and trusted adults, teenagers overall do not show a reliance on those individuals when considering consistent mental health resources. Online therapies have begun to popularize in light of the pandemic and have given people the ease of finding a therapist or an emotional support individual to interact with in times of need without having to leave their homes. Other strategies that may be helpful as well overall relate to the premise of directing the urge or need to vape towards different outlets that will help better mental health and reduce the frequency of actively vaping. Addiction as a whole can be tough to break through and especially since the influence of others can impact the progress made towards the bettering of oneself. Pacing yourself is what will “make or break” the progress you make to eventually quit vaping. Putting in the effort to better mental health by breaking unhealthy habits of vaping will eventually lead to a healthier lifestyle and will hopefully inspire others to eventually do the same.

## References

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