

Understanding Social, Economic, and Cultural Considerations in the Banning of Flavored Tobaccos

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ABSTRACT

Background: As counties across the country consider regulating and banning flavored tobacco, it is essential to understand tobacco user perspectives prior to decisions. This project focused on the use of flavored tobacco -- specifically vapes and hookah -- in Middle Eastern communities in the Bay Area in order to better understand the social, economic, and cultural implications of tobacco bans.

Methods: Thirty semi-structured community interviews were conducted with 17 women and 13 men of Middle Eastern descent. Semi-structured interviews focused on what hookah products they smoke(d), when they started smoking hookah, why they started smoking hookah, what their familiarity is with flavored tobacco smoke policies in the Bay Area. All participants were also asked if/why they quit or considered quitting.

Results: Key themes included: Peer pressure, the perceived "cool factor" of smoking, cultural normalization of hookah smoking, tobacco flavors, and quitting for personal reasons.

Conclusions: The conclusions and recommendations to the Santa Clara County Health Department were to invest in data to understand the short-term (economic and health) consequences of hookah smoking in Middle Eastern communities and engage stakeholders from vulnerable populations through focus groups in order to understand what would work for prevention and cessation.