

Understanding the Phenomenon of Vaping among High School Students: A Basis for Intervention Program

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ABSTRACT

Vaping among adolescents has become a significant public health concern, particularly within high school environments. This study aims to understand the motivations, perceptions, and social dynamics that drive vaping behavior among high school students at Guinaoang National High School. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with students who engage in vaping. The study focused on exploring factors such as peer pressure, social acceptance, emotional relief, and the influence of older students. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes. The findings reveal that vaping is often perceived as a low-risk activity, with many students underestimating its health risks due to a lack of comprehensive education and the normalization of vaping within their social circles. Peer pressure, the desire for social acceptance, and emotional relief were identified as primary motivators. Additionally, defiance against school rules and the desire for autonomy were significant factors influencing vaping behavior. The study highlights the need for comprehensive educational campaigns, peer-led support programs, stronger enforcement of school policies, and increased community and parental involvement to address the issue of vaping among adolescents. These interventions aim to create a supportive environment that discourages vaping and promotes healthier behaviors.

Keywords: Vaping, Adolescents, Peer Pressure, Social Acceptance, Emotional Relief, Health Risks, Educational Campaigns, School Policies, Community Involvement

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Vaping, or the use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), has rapidly gained popularity worldwide, especially among adolescents. Unlike traditional cigarettes, which burn tobacco to deliver nicotine, vaping devices heat a liquid (commonly known as e-liquid or vape juice) containing nicotine, flavorings, and other chemicals. While e-cigarettes were initially marketed as a safer alternative to traditional smoking, growing evidence highlights the risks associated with vaping, particularly for younger individuals. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that e-cigarettes contain harmful substances such as nicotine, volatile organic compounds, and heavy metals like lead, which can negatively impact brain development in adolescents and increase the risk of addiction (CDC, 2021).

In the Philippines, vaping has become a growing concern among youth. The passage of Republic Act No. 11900, also known as the “Vaporized Nicotine and Non-Nicotine Products Regulation Act,” in 2022 introduced regulations to mitigate the harmful effects of vaping. This law prohibits the sale of vaporized nicotine and non-nicotine products to minors and restricts their use in public places, including schools (RA No. 11900, 2022). Despite the enactment of these laws, the prevalence of vaping among high school students continues to rise, indicating challenges in enforcing regulations within school environments.

To complement the national regulations, the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) released the Gender Responsive and Non-Discriminatory Student Discipline Manual (GRaNdSDisM) through Regional Memo 173, s. 2022. This policy emphasizes the importance of promoting non-discriminatory and gender-sensitive

approaches to student discipline, including handling incidents of substance use such as vaping. GRaNdSDisM aims to foster an inclusive environment that addresses behavioral issues like vaping while ensuring that disciplinary actions do not marginalize students based on their gender or identity.

Internationally, several countries have imposed stringent regulations on vaping to protect public health, particularly that of young people. For example, in the United States, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates e-cigarettes under the Tobacco Control Act, requiring premarket approval for all e-cigarette products (FDA, 2020). Similarly, in Australia, the sale of nicotine-containing e-cigarettes is illegal unless prescribed by a doctor, a regulation aimed at preventing minors from accessing these products (Australian Government Department of Health, 2021). These global efforts emphasize the increasing recognition of vaping as a public health concern, particularly among youth.

Despite the national and international regulations that aim to limit access to vaping products for minors, schools like Guinaoang National High School are witnessing a rise in vaping incidents among students. Established in 1979, Guinaoang National High School is located in the municipality of Mankayan, Benguet, and serves a diverse group of students, most of whom come from indigenous communities in the Municipality. As of School Year 2024-2025, the school has a total of 566 enrolled students. The increase in vaping incidents within the school highlights a significant challenge that goes beyond policy implementation—it reveals the need to address the underlying social and psychological factors that drive students to engage in this behavior.

This research aims to investigate the motivations behind student engagement in vaping, their understanding of its health risks, and the peer and environmental pressures that contribute to its prevalence. The study will focus on the students' perspectives and experiences regarding vaping, aiming to provide insights that can inform the development of more effective school-based intervention programs. Given the recent rise in vaping among adolescents, it is crucial to assess current strategies and understand the lived experiences of students to create tailored responses.

By adopting a case study approach, this research will explore the unique perspectives of students and identify key factors influencing their decision to vape despite awareness campaigns and existing school regulations. Additionally, this research will assess the role of peer influence, accessibility to vaping products, and the perceived benefits or appeal of vaping to students.

The findings from this research will have several implications for Guinaoang National High School and other similar educational institutions. First, it will provide school administrators and policymakers with an in-depth understanding of why students engage in vaping, which can inform the design of evidence-based interventions and educational campaigns. The insights gained from this research will also enable the school to craft more effective policies that directly address the root causes of vaping and ensure compliance with Republic Act No. 11900.

Moreover, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on adolescent health and behavioral interventions in the Philippines. By identifying the social dynamics and psychological drivers of vaping behavior, the school and community will be better equipped to discourage vaping, fostering a healthier and safer environment for students. The application of policies such as GRaNdSDisM ensures that any disciplinary actions regarding vaping will be handled in a manner that respects the students' rights, promotes gender equality, and fosters an inclusive learning environment.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the experiences, motivations, and perceptions of high school students regarding vaping. The goal is to understand the reasons behind the increasing vaping incidents within the school and how students perceive the risks and benefits of this habit.

1. What are the lived experiences of students who engage in vaping within the school premises?
2. What factors motivate or influence students to engage in vaping despite school regulations?

3. How do students perceive the health risks and consequences of vaping?
4. How can the school and the community effectively address the issue of vaping?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to address the increasing prevalence of vaping among high school students and its implications for various stakeholders. For school administrators and educators, the research provides a deeper understanding of the factors driving students to engage in vaping, facilitating the development of targeted interventions and inclusive policies aligned with Republic Act No. 11900 and GRaNdSDisM. Policymakers can utilize the findings to refine and enforce vaping regulations, ensuring they are evidence-based and effectively address the issue among adolescents. Parents and guardians will gain insights into the motivations and environmental influences behind vaping, empowering them to foster supportive home environments and engage in meaningful discussions with their children about its risks and consequences. For students, the study seeks to empower them with knowledge about the health risks associated with vaping, encouraging informed decision-making and promoting peer-led initiatives. Furthermore, the community benefits from collaborative efforts inspired by the research findings, contributing to a healthier and safer environment for all. This study provides a foundation for creating effective and sustainable strategies to mitigate vaping among adolescents, fostering a more supportive educational landscape.

Scope and Delimitations

This study explored the prevalence and underlying factors contributing to vaping among high school students at Guinaoang National High School during the School Year 2024-2025. It examined the students' motivations, perceptions, and experiences related to vaping, as well as the social, psychological, and environmental influences that encouraged this behavior.

The research focused exclusively on high school students enrolled at Guinaoang National High School. This specific population was chosen due to the notable increase in vaping incidents observed within the institution. The study employed a qualitative case study approach, utilizing focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to gather rich, detailed insights from students. This methodology allowed the research to comprehensively explore the personal and contextual factors influencing students' engagement in vaping.

The delimitations of the study were clearly defined to ensure a focused inquiry into the subject matter. Firstly, the population under investigation was exclusively comprised of high school students enrolled at Guinaoang National High School, explicitly excluding individuals from other educational institutions, adults, and out-of-school youth. This specific demographic was chosen to narrow the study's scope and obtain relevant insights from a defined group. Geographically, the study was restricted to the area surrounding Guinaoang National High School, located in Mankayan, Benguet, thereby allowing for contextual considerations unique to this location.

Additionally, the timeframe for data collection was set during the second semester of the School Year 2024-2025. As a result, the findings may not address emerging trends or behaviors that could develop after this period. The central focus of the research was to understand the motivations and experiences of students regarding vaping. However, it is important to note that the study did not assess the effectiveness of any existing policies or interventions aimed at mitigating vaping incidents within the school.

Lastly, the data collected for this research was primarily based on self-reported information from participants. This approach carries inherent limitations, as responses may be influenced by biases such as social desirability or inaccuracies in recall. Therefore, while the study provides valuable insights, these delimitations must be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

The phenomenon of vaping, marked by the use of electronic cigarettes to inhale aerosolized substances, has emerged as a pressing global health concern, particularly among adolescents. Numerous studies have examined its implications, emphasizing health risks, behavioral patterns, and the efficacy of regulations. This review

consolidates existing literature on vaping, focusing on its prevalence among youth, associated risks, and policy measures.

The increasing prevalence of vaping among adolescents has been widely observed. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported a sharp rise in e-cigarette use among middle and high school students in the United States between 2011 and 2019. Similarly, in the Philippines, a parallel trend has been documented, with an uptick in high school students engaging in vaping despite regulatory measures. Research by Peña and Reyes (2023) highlighted factors such as easy access, peer influence, and aggressive marketing strategies that target youth, emphasizing flavored options and the perceived safety of e-cigarettes.

Contrary to claims that e-cigarettes are a safer alternative to traditional smoking, studies reveal significant health risks associated with vaping. Nicotine, a common ingredient in these products, is highly addictive and negatively impacts adolescent brain development. Research has also identified harmful substances in e-cigarette aerosols, including volatile organic compounds and heavy metals such as lead, which pose long-term health risks (Jankowski et al., 2020). Moreover, vaping has been linked to increased likelihoods of transitioning to traditional cigarette smoking, further perpetuating nicotine dependency (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2018).

Various countries have implemented regulatory frameworks to address the vaping epidemic. In the Philippines, the enactment of Republic Act No. 11900, or the "Vaporized Nicotine and Non-Nicotine Products Regulation Act," in 2022 sought to limit youth access to these products by prohibiting sales to minors and restricting usage in public spaces, including schools. However, enforcement remains a challenge, especially in rural areas where monitoring mechanisms are limited. Additionally, the Cordillera Administrative Region introduced the Gender Responsive and Non-Discriminatory Student Discipline Manual (GRaNdSDisM) through Regional Memo 173, s. 2022, which promotes restorative rather than punitive measures in addressing student vaping incidents (Department of Education [DepEd] CAR, 2022).

Globally, the United States and Australia have adopted stringent measures to combat youth vaping. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) mandates premarket approval for e-cigarette products under the Tobacco Control Act, while Australia employs a prescription-only model for nicotine-containing e-cigarettes, significantly curtailing access for minors (Australian Government Department of Health, 2021). Comparative analyses suggest that such stringent policies effectively limit youth access to these products (Green et al., 2022).

Social and psychological factors significantly influence adolescent vaping behaviors. Peer influence, curiosity, and the appeal of flavored e-liquids are commonly cited motivations. A study by Smith and Jones (2021) found that many adolescents associate vaping with social acceptance and experimentation. Psychological factors, such as stress and coping mechanisms, also play a critical role in driving vaping behaviors (Brown et al., 2020). In the Philippine context, socioeconomic factors exacerbate the issue, with some students perceiving vaping as a status symbol or an act of rebellion (Peña & Reyes, 2023).

Educational institutions are pivotal in addressing vaping among students. School-based campaigns highlighting the health risks of vaping have proven effective in changing perceptions and reducing usage rates (NASEM, 2018). Restorative justice approaches, as advocated by GRaNdSDisM, emphasize understanding underlying causes and fostering supportive environments, aligning with best practices in adolescent health promotion (DepEd CAR, 2022).

While significant research has been conducted on vaping, gaps remain in understanding the nuanced experiences of adolescents who engage in this behavior. Most studies adopt quantitative methods, focusing on prevalence and risk factors, yet fail to capture the social and psychological dimensions. Addressing these gaps is crucial, particularly in understanding the motivations and environmental factors that drive students to vape, especially in unique cultural and socioeconomic contexts such as Guinaoang National High School.

The rising prevalence of vaping among adolescents necessitates a multifaceted approach that combines stringent regulations, inclusive school policies, and active community involvement. Although laws like RA No.

11900 and frameworks like GRaNdSDisM provide a foundation, their success depends on addressing the social and psychological drivers underlying vaping behaviors. This study contributes to the broader discourse by providing qualitative insights into student experiences, aiding the development of targeted interventions.

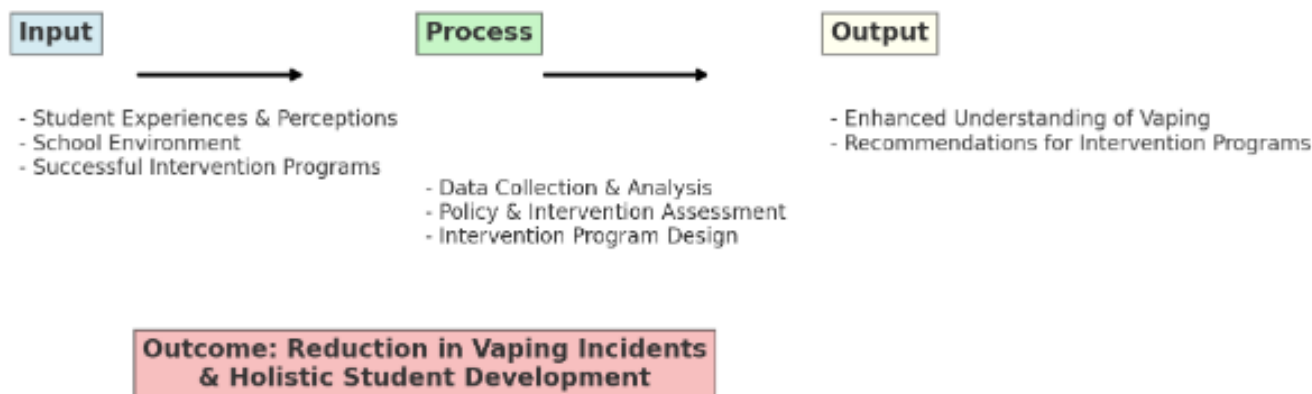


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study serves as the backbone for understanding the various dimensions of the vaping phenomenon among high school students. It is structured around three interrelated phases—Input, Process, and Output—which collectively guide the investigation. The ultimate aim of the framework is reflected in the overarching Outcome, which envisions a reduction in vaping incidents and the holistic development of students.

The **Input phase** lays the groundwork by identifying key elements that influence vaping behaviors among students. This includes understanding their experiences and perceptions, which provide qualitative insights into why students engage in vaping, whether for curiosity, peer acceptance, or as a coping mechanism. The school environment is also a critical component, encompassing factors such as the availability of vaping products, the influence of peer networks, and the effectiveness of enforcement mechanisms. Furthermore, the study considers existing intervention programs—both local and global—that have successfully addressed similar challenges, aiming to adapt best practices to the unique context of Guinaoang National High School. These inputs collectively form a robust foundation for addressing the root causes of vaping behaviors.

In the **Process phase**, the study employs systematic methods to analyze and address the identified factors. Data collection and analysis play a pivotal role, using tools such as interviews, focus groups, and surveys to gather insights from diverse stakeholders, including students, teachers, and community members. The study also critically evaluates existing policies, such as Republic Act No. 11900 and the GRaNdSDisM framework, to assess their effectiveness in mitigating vaping incidents. Based on these insights, targeted intervention programs are developed, tailored to the specific needs of the students and the community. This phase emphasizes a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to understanding and addressing the factors that drive vaping behaviors among adolescents.

The **Output phase** focuses on the tangible results derived from the study. One key output is an enhanced understanding of the motivations, perceptions, and experiences of students regarding vaping. This nuanced understanding provides the basis for formulating actionable recommendations that schools and communities can implement to address the issue effectively. These recommendations aim to emphasize prevention, education, and rehabilitation rather than punitive measures, aligning with best practices in adolescent health promotion.

Finally, the study's ultimate **Outcome** seeks to achieve a significant reduction in vaping incidents while fostering the holistic development of students. This outcome highlights the importance of creating a supportive

and healthier school environment that not only discourages vaping but also enables students to thrive academically, socially, and personally.

By addressing the research questions within each phase, the framework ensures a structured and focused exploration of the vaping phenomenon. It captures the lived experiences and motivations of students, assesses their perceptions of health risks, and evaluates the effectiveness of school and community interventions. Ultimately, this conceptual framework bridges the gap between theoretical understanding and practical solutions, paving the way for sustainable strategies to address the challenges posed by adolescent vaping.

METHODOLOGY

This study explores the lived experiences, motivations, and perceptions of high school students regarding vaping at Guinaoang National High School. A qualitative case study approach is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon within its specific context.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the experiences, motivations, and perceptions of high school students regarding vaping at Guinaoang National High School. The researchers opted for a case study approach for several key reasons. First, vaping among adolescents is a complex phenomenon influenced by individual motivations, social dynamics, and environmental factors. By utilizing a case study design, the researchers were able to conduct a comprehensive exploration of these interconnected influences within the specific context of Guinaoang National High School. This approach allowed them to move beyond simple observational data to develop insights into the intricate web of causation and meaning-making that informs students' vaping decisions.

Second, the case study methodology provided an opportunity to examine vaping behaviors within their natural setting, thereby capturing unique characteristics and dynamics specific to Guinaoang National High School that may contribute to the prevalence of vaping trends. This contextual understanding was essential for interpreting the findings accurately and for developing targeted school-based interventions that address the issue in a way that is relevant to the local environment. Through this study, the researchers aimed to shed light on the underlying factors influencing vaping among students, ultimately contributing to more effective strategies for prevention and intervention within the school setting.

Sample and Sampling Method

This study utilized a purposive sampling technique to ensure the selection of participants who could provide relevant and meaningful insights into the phenomenon of vaping among adolescents. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was chosen as it allows researchers to deliberately identify individuals whose experiences align with the research objectives. This approach was particularly suitable for the study, as it focused on a specific behavioral pattern—vaping—requiring firsthand perspectives from those directly engaged in the activity.

Participants were selected based on documented involvement in vaping-related incidents, as recorded by the school's Disciplinary Action Committee. This committee systematically monitors and maintains records of student violations, providing a reliable basis for identifying individuals who had engaged in vaping. The inclusion of students with official documentation ensured that the study was grounded in verifiable behavioral patterns rather than self-reported claims alone, thereby enhancing the credibility and accuracy of the data.

A total of 15 students from Grades 7 to 12 were selected for participation. This age range was deliberately chosen to encompass a critical period of adolescent development, during which students are more susceptible to experimentation with substances, including vaping. Adolescence is marked by identity exploration, peer influence, and risk-taking behaviors, making this demographic particularly relevant for understanding the motivations and contextual factors that drive vaping habits among high school students.

Table 1. Anonymized table of informants

Nickname	Grade Level	Gender
AJ	Grade 10	Male
Bea	Grade 11	Female
Carlo	Grade 10	Male
Daphne	Grade 9	Female
Eli	Grade 10	Male
Faye	Grade 8	Female
Gabe	Grade 11	Male
Hana	Grade 10	Female
Ivan	Grade 7	Male
Jazz	Grade 9	Female
Kev	Grade 12	Male
Lila	Grade 8	Female
Marco	Grade 11	Male
Nikki	Grade 10	Female
Ollie	Grade 12	Male

Furthermore, only students who had personally experienced vaping were included in the study. This criterion was essential in ensuring that the narratives collected were authentic and reflective of actual engagement in vaping rather than secondhand observations or assumptions. By focusing on individuals with direct experience, the study aimed to uncover the underlying motivations, perceptions, and social influences associated with vaping, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of this behavior within the school setting.

Locale of the Study

The locale of this study on vaping behaviors among high school students was Guinaoang National High School, located in Mankayan, Benguet. This setting was purposefully chosen for several reasons, all relating to its potential to provide rich, contextually relevant data.

The school environment itself is a critical factor in shaping student interactions, peer influences, and responses to health-related behaviors. By conducting the study at the school, researchers gained access to the very environment where vaping behaviors occur and are influenced. This provided a natural backdrop for understanding the social dynamics and pressures related to vaping. The embeddedness of the study within the school context allowed for observations and insights that would be difficult or impossible to obtain in a different setting.

Furthermore, conducting the study at Guinaoang National High School allowed for easier access to the student population. While home visits were sometimes necessary for more in-depth or sensitive conversations, the school setting provided a central, convenient location to engage with students. This facilitated logistics and likely improved participation rates.

Research Instruments

In this study, data was collected using two primary instruments designed to gather in-depth insights into the vaping behaviors of high school students.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed for conducting one-on-one interviews with each participant. This guide was focused on exploring individual experiences related to vaping, including their motivations for engaging in this behavior, their perceived consequences, and their perspectives on the school's anti-vaping interventions. By providing a flexible structure, the interviews allowed participants to share their stories while also addressing key themes related to vaping.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) prompts were utilized to facilitate group discussions among students. These prompts encouraged participants to explore shared experiences, peer influences, and the environmental factors contributing to vaping behaviors. This method enabled a collective examination of student perceptions regarding vaping and its impact on their school life, fostering a deeper understanding of the social dynamics at play.

Data Collection Methods

This study employed a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) as primary data collection methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences, motivations, and perceptions regarding vaping. These qualitative approaches were selected to capture both individual perspectives and the broader social dynamics influencing adolescent vaping behavior. The semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth, personalized discussions, each lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour. A structured yet flexible interview protocol guided these sessions, focusing on key themes such as students' motivations for vaping, their awareness of its consequences, and their perspectives on school-based anti-vaping interventions. The interviews were conducted in private settings, either within designated school rooms or, in some cases, at students' residences, to ensure confidentiality and encourage candid responses. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to maintain accuracy in data analysis. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were assigned, and all identifying information was removed from transcripts.

In addition to individual interviews, FGDs were conducted to explore the collective perceptions and peer dynamics related to vaping. Each group consisted of four to five participants, a size that facilitated active engagement while maintaining manageability. The discussions were structured around key themes, including the role of peer influence in vaping initiation and continuation, perceptions of vaping's benefits and risks, awareness and opinions on school and community interventions, and access to vaping products. While most participants engaged freely, some initial reluctance was observed. This was addressed by ensuring a non-judgmental environment and reiterating confidentiality, encouraging more open discussions. The FGDs provided valuable insights into the shared attitudes and behaviors surrounding vaping among adolescents.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the data collection process. Informed consent was obtained from both students and their parents through formal letters detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation. Students were given the right to withdraw at any stage without pressure, and if they chose to do so, their data was discreetly discarded as per their request. Safeguarding measures were in place to ensure the well-being of participants, particularly given the sensitivity of the topic. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, with in vivo coding employed to preserve the authenticity of participants' expressions. To enhance reliability and minimize potential bias, multiple researchers were involved in coding the data, and member checks were conducted to allow participants to verify the accuracy of their responses. By integrating both individual interviews and FGDs, the study ensured a nuanced exploration of adolescent vaping, capturing both personal experiences and broader social influences.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed Thematic Analysis using Colaizzi's method, which comprised several systematic steps. Initially, researchers engaged in familiarization with the data by reading the transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions multiple times. This repeated reading enabled them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences related to vaping. Following this, they extracted significant statements from the transcripts that directly pertained to the vaping experiences of the participants.

These key statements were then examined to formulate deeper meanings, as the researchers sought to uncover the underlying thoughts and feelings expressed by the students. Next, similar meanings were organized into clusters, which formed themes representing common patterns in the participants' experiences with vaping. This thematic organization allowed for a clearer aggregation of insights and a structured analysis of the data.

Subsequently, an exhaustive description of the students' experiences with vaping was created, drawing on the identified themes. This detailed account showcased the complexities of their experiences and the factors

influencing their behavior. Finally, to enhance the credibility of the findings, the results were returned to the participants for validation. This step ensured that the participants felt accurately represented in the study and that their voices were authentically reflected in the analysis. Through this methodical approach, the researchers were able to develop a rich, nuanced understanding of the vaping experiences among high school students.

Data Validation

The data validation process for this study involved a comprehensive approach to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the findings. After the analysis was completed, the researchers presented the findings to the student informants, their parents, and the School Head. During this session, informants specifically validated the accuracy of the data, confirming that the researchers' interpretations resonated with their experiences. This engagement exemplified a form of member checking, a vital validation strategy in qualitative research that aims to align the researchers' insights with the participants' lived realities.

As part of this validation process, the researchers took note of any discrepancies raised by the informants and immediately revised the manuscript accordingly. The nature of these discrepancies varied, encompassing factual errors, differing interpretations of events, and nuances in language. By addressing these discrepancies promptly, the researchers demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that the final analysis accurately reflected the participants' perspectives.

To enhance the integrity of the feedback process, detailed minutes were recorded during the validation session. These minutes documented not only attendance but also the specific feedback provided, discussions that took place, and decisions made regarding revisions to the manuscript. This thorough documentation strengthened the transparency and verifiability of the validation process, providing a clear record of how participant input shaped the final outcomes.

The validation process was iterative, with the researchers revisiting the analysis after incorporating feedback from the validation session. Additional data, previously omitted, was included in subsequent drafts, and interpretations were refined to clarify any points of confusion. This iterative nature of validation ensured a comprehensive analysis, enriching the depth and rigor of the research findings.

The School Head participated in the validation process as an audience member, providing feedback that would be taken into consideration for future intervention planning. Their involvement underscored the importance of stakeholder input in developing effective strategies to address vaping among students.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, ethical considerations were paramount in addressing various issues, particularly in relation to confidentiality and informed consent. To ensure the integrity of the research, a letter was sent to the parents of the selected informants seeking their approval for their child's participation. This process emphasized the commitment to voluntary participation, where the informants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

Strict measures were implemented to maintain confidentiality and anonymity throughout the data collection process. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, ensuring that any identifying details, including names, grades, and other personal information, were removed to protect their identities. In instances where photos were taken during focus group discussions, measures were taken to blur those images, further safeguarding the students' privacy.

Written consent from both the students and their parents was secured prior to participation in the study, reinforcing the ethical standards that governed the research. Given the sensitive nature of the vaping issue among adolescents, rigorous ethical guidelines were adhered to at every stage of the study. Anonymity was guaranteed through the assignment of pseudonyms and the removal of any identifying information from transcripts and findings. All collected data was stored securely, accessible only to the research team, thus ensuring that participant confidentiality remained intact.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study, “ASOK CHRONICLES: Understanding the Phenomenon of Vaping Among High School Students,” which aimed to explore the experiences, motivations, and perceptions of high school students regarding vaping. By using a qualitative case study approach, the study examined key factors influencing students' engagement with vaping in school, the perceived risks and benefits of the behavior, and potential strategies to address the issue. The findings of this study are anchored in four major themes derived from the research questions posed in the Statement of the Problem (SOPs). The first theme revolves around the social dynamics and peer influence surrounding vaping, which highlights the significant role of social acceptance, peer pressure, and emotional escape in students' decision to engage in vaping. The second theme, focusing on defiance of authority and autonomy, reveals the influence of school regulations, peer access, and social influence in motivating students to vape despite existing school policies. The third theme, underestimating health risks, explores students' perceptions of the health consequences of vaping, often shaped by a lack of immediate negative effects and misconceptions about the severity of its risks. Lastly, the fourth theme addresses how the school and community can effectively intervene, emphasizing the importance of educational programs, peer-led initiatives, policy enforcement, and community involvement in curbing the vaping behavior among students.

The first major theme, “The Social Dynamics and Peer Influence Surrounding Vaping,” emphasizes the role of peer pressure and social norms in shaping students' decisions to vape. This theme suggests that many students engage in vaping as a way to fit in with their peers, with the behavior often being normalized within certain social circles. This finding aligns with the Social Learning Theory (SLT), which suggests that individuals adopt behaviors through observation and imitation of those they perceive as role models. Furthermore, the Health Belief Model (HBM) is relevant here, as students may underestimate the risks of vaping due to the absence of immediate negative consequences, which makes the behavior more acceptable within their peer groups. The second theme, “Defiance of Authority and the Desire for Autonomy,” highlights how students' motivation to engage in vaping is often driven by a need to challenge school rules and assert their independence. Despite strict regulations, students continue to vape due to factors such as the easy availability of vaping devices and social influence, which are seen as facilitating this behavior. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) sheds light on how the perceived ease of access and social norms strongly influence students' intentions to vape.

The third theme, “Underestimation of Health Risks,” reveals that many students do not perceive vaping as a serious health risk. Their understanding of the long-term consequences is limited, largely due to misconceptions or a lack of comprehensive education on the topic. This theme is particularly aligned with the Health Belief Model, which suggests that students are less likely to change their behavior if they do not perceive themselves as being at risk or if they believe the negative consequences are not severe. The final theme, “Educational and Supportive Interventions for Behavior Change,” focuses on how the school and community can collaborate to effectively address vaping. The study identifies the need for stronger educational programs, peer-led interventions, and more consistent enforcement of school policies as key strategies in mitigating vaping behaviors. The Social Learning Theory and TPB emphasize the importance of providing students with healthier role models and reinforcing positive behavior through community and parental involvement, thereby helping students make more informed decisions regarding their health.

These themes collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics that influence vaping among high school students and suggest multiple pathways for intervention that align with the theoretical frameworks of Health Belief Model, Social Learning Theory, and Theory of Planned Behavior.

The Social Dynamics and Peer Influence Surrounding Vaping

Peer Pressure and the Need to Fit In

Peer pressure emerged as a dominant factor influencing students' decision to engage in vaping, with many students acknowledging the pressure to conform to social norms within their peer groups. AJ (Grade 10), a student who had always prided himself on being confident and outgoing, found himself in a dilemma when his group of friends began experimenting with vaping. *“When my friends started vaping, I felt like I needed to join*

in or they'd think I wasn't cool," AJ explained, recalling how the pressure started subtly at first. He was initially indifferent to the idea of vaping, having never considered it a part of his lifestyle. However, as his friends—whom he had always admired and looked up to—began talking more about it, AJ couldn't help but feel a sense of exclusion whenever they discussed their latest vaping experiences. *"At first, I thought it was just a phase, but then everyone was doing it. I started to feel like I was the only one not participating,"* he admitted.

The situation came to a head during a weekend hangout when his closest friends all gathered. The group was laughing, chatting, and sharing stories, but something was different this time. AJ noticed that every one of his friends had a vape pen in hand, taking casual puffs between jokes and conversations. It felt like an unspoken rule—everyone was doing it, and those who didn't seemed out of place. AJ, who had never really thought much about vaping, suddenly felt the pressure to join in. *"I didn't want to be the odd one out,"* he said, recounting how he felt a knot form in his stomach as he was handed a vape pen by one of his friends. *"I just thought, if I don't do it, they'll think I'm lame or that I'm judging them. I didn't want to lose my place in the group."* In that moment, AJ realized that it wasn't about the act of vaping itself; it was about maintaining his social standing and not feeling left behind in a group he valued so much.

This experience, which AJ described as both uncomfortable and eye-opening, highlights the immense power of peer influence during adolescence. It wasn't just about the allure of vaping; it was about the fear of social isolation and the desire to belong. AJ's story is a clear example of how peer pressure can override individual preferences, especially in a social environment where fitting in is often prioritized over personal choices. This mirrors the findings of **Silva et al. (2019)**, who assert that adolescents are especially vulnerable to peer pressure due to their developmental need for social validation. It also echoes the sentiments expressed in **Glantz et al. (2020)**, who noted that the drive to conform to peer expectations can sometimes lead adolescents to engage in risky behaviors like vaping, even when they are aware of the potential risks involved. For AJ, the need to be seen as "cool" and accepted by his friends outweighed his initial reluctance, reinforcing how social dynamics can influence decision-making in high school settings.

Similarly, *Carlo* (Grade 10) shared, *"I didn't even know much about vaping, but everyone was doing it, so I thought it was the thing to do."* Research by **Glantz et al. (2020)** corroborates this, showing that the desire to fit in with peers often overrides concerns about health risks among adolescents.

Bea (Grade 11) recalled how the environment in her social circle had subtly shifted over the past few months, with vaping becoming an almost expected part of their interactions. *"It wasn't about liking vaping, but about being part of the group,"* *Bea* reflected. *"Everyone in our class was doing it, and I didn't want to be left out."* When she first noticed that her friends had started vaping, *Bea* didn't think much of it. She was initially indifferent, having no real desire to try it herself. But as time went on, she began to notice how seamlessly vaping had woven itself into her friendships. *"We would hang out after school, and it was like everyone had a vape with them. It was just part of the routine—like sharing snacks or talking about the latest show we watched. I didn't feel left out until I wasn't vaping,"* *Bea* explained.

One day, during a typical lunch break, *Bea* found herself in the midst of a conversation where everyone was comparing different flavors of vape juice. *"I felt so awkward because I couldn't contribute to the conversation,"* she confessed. Her friends laughed and teased her for not trying it yet. In an attempt to blend in, *Bea* was handed a vape by her best friend. She was hesitant but didn't want to seem uncool or out of place. *"I didn't really want to do it, but I just thought, if I don't, I'll be left out. It's like I had no choice. I didn't want them to think I was lame or boring,"* *Bea* said, recalling the moment when she took her first hit. *"I didn't even like it. I didn't even know what I was supposed to feel. I just wanted to be part of the group."*

Bea's experience reflects how normalization within certain social groups can make risky behaviors seem less threatening or more acceptable. As vaping became a routine part of her interactions with friends, it lost its stigma and became a marker of social inclusion. The pressure to conform, especially during adolescence, is often overwhelming, leading individuals to adopt behaviors they might not otherwise engage in. This aligns with **Kowalski et al. (2019)**, who found that adolescents often mimic the behaviors of their peers to strengthen social bonds, even when they are aware of the potential risks involved. In *Bea's* case, the act of vaping wasn't

about the habit itself but about maintaining her social standing. The desire for connection and acceptance led her to overlook the negative consequences in favor of fitting in.

Moreover, the normalization of vaping in Bea's social circle also mirrors a broader trend highlighted in research by Sussman et al. (2020), which showed how social networks can significantly influence individual health behaviors. When certain behaviors are normalized, they become less associated with risk and more with social belonging. Bea's story is a poignant example of how peer dynamics can drive individuals to adopt habits they would otherwise avoid, underscoring the importance of creating awareness and preventive measures that address the social influences surrounding vaping.

Eli (Grade 10) described how the constant pressure from his peers made him feel like he had no choice but to participate in vaping, despite not being interested in it at first. *"I felt like I had to vape just to avoid being called boring,"* Eli confessed. *"I wasn't into it at first, but I did it anyway because of the pressure."* His voice reflected the internal conflict he faced between his personal reservations about vaping and the desire to fit in with his friends. *"It wasn't something I wanted to do, but I just didn't want to be the odd one out,"* Eli continued, explaining that he feared being judged or left behind by his social circle. *"Everyone was talking about their flavors and how cool they looked when they vape. I didn't want to be the only one not in on it."*

For Eli, the pressure didn't just come from a few friends but seemed to be a constant, looming presence within his group. *"It felt like every time we hung out, there was always someone with a vape, and they would pass it around, offering it to everyone,"* he recalled. *"It was like if I didn't try it, I'd be looked at as weird or uncool."* Eli's desire to avoid this negative attention led him to try vaping, even though he didn't feel entirely comfortable with it. *"I didn't like the taste, but I didn't want to say no either,"* he admitted. *"It was easier to just go along with it than deal with the pressure from my friends."*

This narrative closely mirrors the experiences described in Vasilenko et al. (2019), which found that many adolescents struggle with internal conflict when faced with peer pressure to engage in risky behaviors. The tension between wanting social acceptance and knowing the potential risks of behaviors like vaping creates a stressful situation for young people. Eli's story illustrates this conflict, as he made a choice to engage in vaping to maintain his social standing, despite his own discomfort and hesitation. The study emphasized how these internal struggles can lead adolescents to make decisions that go against their better judgment, simply to avoid social rejection.

Eli's experience also aligns with insights shared by Kowalski et al. (2019), who noted that peer pressure, particularly among adolescents, often overrides personal concerns about health or safety. The need to conform and be seen as "normal" within a peer group can sometimes outweigh the individual's awareness of the consequences, making them more susceptible to adopting behaviors they otherwise wouldn't. Eli's admission that he wasn't fully comfortable with vaping but did it anyway is a clear example of how peer pressure can dominate decision-making processes during adolescence. His story underscores the importance of addressing these social dynamics and providing support for students to resist the pressures that influence their choices, particularly when it comes to behaviors like vaping.

Finally, Jazz (Grade 9) described a sense of inevitability in her decision to try vaping, reflecting how pervasive the behavior was in her social circle. *"Everyone in my group started vaping, and I didn't want to be the only one who didn't, so I tried it. I felt like I had no choice,"* she admitted. She spoke with a sense of resignation, highlighting the pressure she felt to conform to the group norm. Jazz further explained how the constant presence of vaping among her friends made it hard to remain an outsider. *"It was like, everyone was doing it, and if I didn't try, I'd feel like I wasn't part of the group,"* she added. Jazz's words reflect the tension between her personal reluctance and the social pressure to fit in, a theme central to the Social Learning Theory (SLT) by Albert Bandura. According to SLT, behaviors are learned through observing and imitating others, especially in social contexts where these behaviors are seen as desirable or rewarding. In Jazz's case, the act of vaping was modeled by her peers, and the desire to be accepted led her to adopt this behavior, despite her initial hesitation.

Jazz's experience also aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Icek Ajzen, which suggests that individual behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In Jazz's

case, the perceived social norm in her group was that vaping was an accepted and even desirable behavior. *"It wasn't really about liking vaping," Jazz reflected, "but about not wanting to be seen as uncool or out of place. It just became something everyone did."* This normalization of vaping within her peer group made it harder for Jazz to resist the behavior, despite her internal reservations. The social norm, or subjective norm in TPB terms, influenced Jazz's behavior significantly, as she believed that not vaping would make her an outsider, thus reducing her sense of belonging. This demonstrates the power of peer influence and group dynamics in shaping adolescent behavior, even when the individual may not fully embrace the behavior themselves.

In addition, Jazz spoke about the influence of her friends' perceptions on her decision to vape. *"I noticed that whenever I was with them, they would talk about the flavors and how cool it was, and I didn't want to seem like I was missing out,"* she explained. This highlights how adolescents often adjust their behaviors to match the expectations and perceptions of their peer group. Peltzer et al. (2020) emphasized that such peer influence is a powerful factor in adolescent decision-making, particularly when risky behaviors like vaping are viewed as ways to gain social acceptance. Jazz's story is a clear example of how the desire to belong and be accepted by peers can override personal preferences or concerns about health risks. The need to fit in, especially in the formative years of adolescence, can push students to engage in behaviors they might otherwise avoid.

Her narrative also reinforces the findings of Kowalski et al. (2019), which explored how peer pressure, combined with a desire to align with group behaviors, can lead adolescents to partake in activities like vaping, even when they are aware of the potential harms. Jazz's reluctance to be left out reflects this notion of conformity, where the fear of exclusion becomes a driving force in engaging in behaviors that are seen as common or fashionable within a group. By giving in to the pressure, Jazz conformed to a social practice that, while widely accepted in her circle, carried potential risks to her health. This reinforces the theory that adolescents are highly influenced by their immediate social environments and that their behavior often reflects the norms and expectations within those environments.

Through Jazz's story, it becomes evident how peer pressure and the normalization of behaviors like vaping within social groups can influence adolescents' actions, even when they are not fully convinced or interested in the behavior. Her narrative highlights the role of social context in shaping individual decisions, particularly when it comes to risky behaviors that promise social acceptance but come with health and personal consequences.

Social Acceptance and Group Identity

The need for social acceptance and a strong group identity emerged as a significant motivator for students engaging in vaping. AJ (Grade 10) explained, *"Everyone in my circle vapes, and I felt like I would be excluded if I didn't join in. It's not just about vaping, it's about fitting in with the group."* His statement highlights the role of social pressures in influencing adolescent behaviors, as they seek to belong to peer groups that share common activities. Similarly, Bea (Grade 11) reflected, *"I didn't really care for vaping, but everyone in our class was doing it. I just wanted to be part of the group and didn't want to seem out of place."* This sentiment underscores how group identity and the desire for social acceptance can lead adolescents to engage in behaviors they may not otherwise choose, which is supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). According to the TPB, the intention to engage in behavior such as vaping is often influenced by the perceived norms and expectations of peer groups, where conformity becomes a key factor (Ajzen, 1991).

Daphne, a Grade 9 student, reflected on the intense pressure she felt from her peer group to engage in vaping, despite her initial reservations. *"It was like everyone was doing it, and if I didn't, I'd be left out. I didn't want to be seen as uncool, so I tried it even though I wasn't sure about it,"* she confessed. Daphne's experience highlights the psychological battle that many adolescents face when navigating peer influences. For her, the allure of social acceptance and the desire to fit in with her group were far stronger than her concerns about the health risks associated with vaping. She explained that, although she wasn't genuinely interested in vaping, the fear of exclusion outweighed her concerns. This is a common dilemma among teenagers, where the pressure to conform often supersedes their awareness of potential health risks.

In her school environment, vaping had become a norm—something that most students, especially those in her circle, did regularly. Daphne described how it felt almost like an unwritten rule: if you wanted to belong, you needed to participate in these group activities. The strong influence of her peer group made her feel that rejecting vaping would label her as an outsider. As she explained, *“It wasn’t just about liking it, it was more about not wanting to be the one person who wasn’t doing it. That would have been awkward.”* The normalization of vaping within her group created a situation where participation seemed almost compulsory to her social survival. This reflects the findings of Peltzer et al. (2020), which assert that adolescents often mimic peer behaviors to maintain their social status, regardless of the negative consequences that may arise.

From the perspective of the Health Belief Model (HBM), Daphne’s actions can be understood through the lens of perceived benefits versus perceived risks. While she may have been aware, on some level, that vaping could be harmful, the perceived benefits—mainly social acceptance and maintaining her place in the group—outweighed those risks. The HBM suggests that when adolescents perceive high social benefits from engaging in a certain behavior, they may downplay or ignore the potential long-term health risks. In Daphne’s case, fitting in with her friends was more immediate and tangible than worrying about the potential long-term consequences of vaping.

Furthermore, Daphne’s statement also illustrates a critical aspect of adolescent behavior: the tendency to prioritize immediate social rewards over long-term health concerns. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that the intention to engage in a behavior like vaping is often guided by the social environment, particularly perceived norms and expectations. For Daphne, vaping wasn’t just about the act itself but about fulfilling a social role within her peer group. As Ajzen (1991) highlights in the TPB, social norms and the influence of close peers play a critical role in shaping adolescent decisions, often outweighing any long-term health concerns.

In recounting her experience, Daphne acknowledges that her initial decision to try vaping was not based on genuine desire but on the powerful need to conform. She says, *“Looking back, I realize I didn’t really want to vape, but I wanted to fit in more than anything else. It’s like it didn’t even matter that it wasn’t something I cared for.”* This statement reflects a critical aspect of adolescent decision-making, where the drive for peer acceptance can lead to risky behaviors, even if those behaviors don’t align with personal values or preferences. Daphne’s story serves as an example of how adolescents, particularly in high-pressure social environments, can make decisions that prioritize short-term social rewards over long-term health considerations, thus highlighting the strong influence of peer pressure on youth behavior.

Similarly, Hana, a Grade 10 student, described how vaping became ingrained in the social fabric of her class, making it feel almost inevitable to participate. *“Vaping was just part of our culture, so to speak. Everyone in my class was doing it, and I didn’t want to feel left out, so I just followed along,”* she shared, recalling the pressures she faced to conform. For Hana, the act of vaping wasn’t driven by a personal desire for the habit, but rather a compulsion to fit into her peer group, where it had become an accepted norm. In her perspective, opting out of vaping would have led to social isolation, which she felt was something she couldn’t afford. This pressure to conform to social expectations reflects the powerful role that peer dynamics play in shaping adolescent behavior, especially in a group where certain activities are highly normalized.

The concept of *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) can provide insight into Hana’s experience. According to this theory, individuals often align their behaviors and beliefs with those of a group to maintain a sense of belonging and secure their membership within the group. For Hana, vaping became a symbol of inclusion within her social circle. She observed that everyone in her class was participating in it, and the fear of being left out motivated her to engage in the behavior, even if she didn’t personally find it appealing. Hana’s actions are a reflection of how social identity is reinforced through shared behaviors, and how the need to belong to a group can influence individual choices.

In the context of her school environment, vaping wasn’t just a recreational activity—it was a social marker. *“It wasn’t just about doing it for fun. Everyone did it, so it was part of our routine,”* Hana added, emphasizing how vaping had become an essential component of her class’s social life. The normalization of vaping in her peer group created an atmosphere where not participating felt like a breach of social norms, making it difficult

for Hana to resist the behavior. Her account aligns with the findings of Kowalski et al. (2019), who noted that adolescents are often driven by the need to belong, leading them to engage in risky behaviors like vaping when such behaviors are seen as part of the group culture.

Hana's story also mirrors what is discussed in the *Health Belief Model* (HBM), where the perceived benefits of joining a social group outweigh the individual's awareness of the potential risks associated with the behavior. While Hana acknowledged that vaping might not have been her first choice, the perceived benefit of maintaining her social connections and fitting into her class culture was enough to make her overlook the potential long-term health risks. According to the HBM, when adolescents weigh the benefits of immediate social acceptance more heavily than health risks, they are more likely to engage in behaviors like vaping, even if they are aware of the potential harms.

In her reflection, Hana expressed how difficult it was to avoid vaping when it was so pervasive in her social environment. *"It was like I couldn't escape it. If I didn't join in, it felt like I wouldn't be part of the group anymore. Everyone just did it, and I didn't want to be the odd one out."* Her statement further underscores the social pressures adolescents face, particularly in environments where certain behaviors are normalized and institutionalized within peer groups. Hana's experience illustrates how adolescent behavior, particularly in relation to risky activities like vaping, is often more about fitting in and maintaining social standing than about making informed decisions based on health risks. This story highlights the strong influence of peer dynamics and the challenges students face when navigating behaviors that are accepted within their social circles.

Kev, a Grade 12 student, opened up about how social pressures played a significant role in his decision to start vaping, despite not enjoying it himself. *"It wasn't even about liking it; it was more about being part of the crowd. If you didn't vape, you were kind of seen as out of touch with what everyone else was doing,"* he reflected. Kev's words highlight how adolescents, particularly in their senior years of high school, often face an intense desire to fit in, and how this need can override individual preferences and concerns about the potential risks of certain behaviors. For Kev, the act of vaping was less about personal preference and more about aligning himself with the expectations of his peer group, even if it didn't feel entirely right to him. The pressure to conform to group norms became so powerful that the idea of being excluded from the group was far more daunting than any health risks associated with vaping.

Kev's experience directly ties into *social identity theory*, which emphasizes that individuals often modify their behavior to maintain their membership within a particular group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In Kev's case, the group identity that revolved around vaping was too important to disregard, even if it meant compromising personal beliefs or preferences. When everyone around him was vaping, choosing not to participate meant potentially jeopardizing his position within the group. Kev's words illustrate how peer group dynamics can be so powerful that they drive individuals to make decisions that are not aligned with their values, but rather with the desire for social acceptance.

Further supporting this, *Peltzer et al. (2020)* suggest that adolescents are heavily influenced by peer behaviors, especially in environments where certain behaviors, like vaping, are normalized. Kev's story reflects this finding, as the decision to vape wasn't driven by a personal interest in the activity but by the need to maintain social standing. *"It was just what everyone was doing,"* Kev added. In his eyes, opting out of vaping would have made him stand out in a negative way, and that risk of social exclusion was enough to push him to participate in the behavior. This highlights the importance of group dynamics in shaping adolescents' decisions, even when they are fully aware of the risks involved.

Kev also expressed that the social pressure to vape wasn't limited to any specific event but was a consistent, everyday occurrence. *"It wasn't just one moment. It was an ongoing thing. Every day, it felt like everyone was vaping, and if you didn't, you were looked at like you didn't know what was going on."* This ongoing social reinforcement of vaping as the norm within his peer group further demonstrates the influence of *social learning theory* (Bandura, 1977), where individuals learn behaviors by observing and imitating others. In Kev's case, his peers modeled the behavior of vaping consistently, making it appear as an essential part of his social environment, which in turn encouraged him to adopt the behavior himself.

Kev's reflection underscores the profound impact that peer influence can have on adolescent behavior, especially in relation to high-risk activities like vaping. The pressure to conform and the desire to maintain a positive social identity within his group led Kev to prioritize social acceptance over personal beliefs or health concerns. This experience not only aligns with the findings of Peltzer et al. (2020) but also with the principles of *Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)*, which suggests that behavior is heavily influenced by intentions shaped by social and environmental factors (Ajzen, 1991). Kev's story exemplifies how group identity and peer pressure can strongly guide adolescent actions, often at the expense of long-term health considerations.

Marco, a Grade 11 student, shared his thoughts on the social pressures that led him to start vaping, despite not being particularly interested in it. *"If you're not into vaping, you're sort of considered an outsider. It's like a group thing. Everyone is doing it, so you feel like you have to do it too, to be included,"* he explained. Marco's words highlight a significant challenge adolescents face: the desire to fit in and be accepted by their peers often overrides their personal inclinations or concerns about the risks associated with certain behaviors, such as vaping. For Marco, vaping wasn't an activity he genuinely enjoyed, but it became an essential part of the group culture. By not participating, he feared being excluded or ostracized by his friends, which ultimately pushed him to adopt the behavior.

Marco's experience aligns with the *Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)*, which asserts that an individual's behavior is influenced not only by personal attitudes but also by social norms, the perceived control over the behavior, and the influence of those around them (Ajzen, 1991). In Marco's case, the social norm within his peer group was clear: vaping was the accepted behavior, and those who didn't participate were seen as outliers. The desire to maintain his social standing and be part of the group became more important than his personal disinterest in the activity. The strong influence of social norms in shaping adolescent behavior, especially in relation to risky behaviors like vaping, underscores the role of peer pressure in these decisions.

This phenomenon is corroborated by Kowalski et al. (2019), who found that adolescents are highly susceptible to adopting behaviors that are seen as the norm within their peer group, even if they are fully aware of the associated risks. The notion of vaping as a social norm within Marco's group mirrors the findings of this research, where the drive for social inclusion outweighs the understanding of potential health consequences. Marco's statement reflects how peer pressure creates a compelling desire to fit in, making the perceived benefits of group membership—such as social acceptance and belonging—far more attractive than the potential health risks of vaping.

Marco also described how the pressure to conform was not a one-time event but a continuous experience. *"It's not just once in a while that people are vaping; it's almost every day. When it's all around you, you feel like you're missing out if you don't do it."* This constant reinforcement of vaping as a group activity made it increasingly difficult for Marco to resist. It wasn't just about a single instance of social pressure; it was a daily occurrence that reinforced the idea that vaping was integral to being part of the group. This aligns with *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which suggests that individuals are motivated to engage in behaviors that align with their group identity in order to avoid the negative consequences of being excluded.

In Marco's case, vaping was more than just an activity; it was a symbol of belonging. His narrative shows how group dynamics can shape adolescent behavior, pushing individuals to conform to behaviors they might not necessarily engage in otherwise. By participating in vaping, Marco was able to maintain his status within the group, reinforcing the powerful influence of peer group dynamics on adolescent behavior. This case study not only supports the findings of Kowalski et al. (2019) but also provides insight into how social norms within peer groups create a powerful pull for adolescents to engage in behaviors like vaping, even if they do not initially desire to do so.

The influence of social acceptance and group identity is a powerful motivator for adolescent behavior. As evidenced by the informants' experiences, the pressure to conform to peer expectations and gain social approval often leads adolescents to engage in behaviors like vaping, despite being aware of the potential risks. This pattern is consistent with both the Health Belief Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior, which suggest that adolescents prioritize immediate social rewards over long-term health considerations. The

normalization of vaping within certain social circles further amplifies this tendency, making it difficult for students to resist the pressure to fit in.

Emotional Escape and Stress Relief

Vaping has emerged as a prevalent coping mechanism among adolescents, with many using it as a means to manage stress and navigate emotional difficulties. For some, it provides a temporary escape from overwhelming situations, offering a sense of relief and calm. This behavior is often influenced by the examples set by peers and family members, who model vaping as an effective way to handle emotional challenges. As such, the practice is deeply rooted in the need for emotional regulation and is shaped by social and psychological factors that drive its adoption among young individuals.

Bea (Grade 11) shared, *"I started vaping during exam week because I felt overwhelmed. My older cousin told me it helps to calm down, and I saw her use it whenever she was stressed, so I thought I'd give it a try."* Bea's experience aligns with *Social Learning Theory (SLT)*, which posits that behaviors are learned by observing and imitating role models (Bandura, 1977). For Bea, her cousin served as a model of using vaping to cope with stress, reinforcing the behavior as a viable solution for emotional relief.

Faye, an eighth-grader, shared her personal experience with vaping as a coping mechanism during challenging times. *"Whenever I feel like things are too much, like with school and family problems, vaping feels like my escape. It's like I can breathe easier for a moment,"* she confessed. Her words highlight the emotional relief that many adolescents associate with vaping, framing it as a temporary reprieve from the pressures of their daily lives. Faye's story reflects a broader trend identified by Kowitt et al. (2019), which revealed that stress management is one of the primary motivators for youth engagement in vaping.

Faye's reliance on vaping indicates an emotional vulnerability common among adolescents who struggle with the complexities of academic pressures and familial challenges. The immediate calming effect she describes aligns with Bandura's *Social Learning Theory (SLT)*, which posits that behaviors are often modeled after others who appear to benefit from them. It is plausible that Faye observed peers or older individuals turning to vaping for stress relief and emulated their behavior, believing it to be an effective strategy for coping. Moreover, her actions can also be understood through the *Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)*, which suggests that the belief in vaping's ability to provide emotional relief can strongly influence the intention to engage in the behavior. Faye's case underscores the importance of addressing the root causes of adolescent stress and providing healthier outlets for emotional expression and stress management.

Carlo, a Grade 10 student, revealed his reliance on vaping as a way to manage intense emotions, offering a deeper look into the emotional vulnerabilities that adolescents may experience. *"I don't think about the long-term effects when I vape. All I know is that when I'm feeling down or angry, it helps me calm down,"* he explained. For Carlo, the act of vaping has become a form of emotional self-regulation—a mechanism he turns to when overwhelmed by sadness or frustration. He admitted that stressful situations, whether due to academic pressures, family conflicts, or social tensions, often leave him feeling emotionally drained, and vaping provides a momentary sense of relief and calmness that he struggles to find elsewhere.

Carlo's experience reflects the key principles of the *Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)*. His intention to vape is strongly influenced by his belief that it provides immediate emotional benefits, such as reducing stress and soothing anger. This focus on short-term relief often overrides any concern he might have about the long-term consequences of his behavior, illustrating a common cognitive bias in adolescents who prioritize present comfort over future risks. Moreover, Carlo's story aligns with findings from McKeganey et al. (2020), who highlighted that many adolescents perceive vaping as an effective tool for emotional relief, even though they may recognize its potential health hazards.

Social Learning Theory (SLT) also sheds light on Carlo's behavior. He mentioned observing his peers using vaping as a way to "de-stress," which may have normalized the behavior for him. The influence of seeing others handle their emotions through vaping likely contributed to his decision to adopt the habit, suggesting that his environment plays a significant role in shaping his coping mechanisms.

Carlo's reliance on vaping underscores a critical emotional vulnerability. It is not merely a recreational activity for him but a response to the pressures and uncertainties of adolescence. His case reveals the broader issue of limited access to healthier coping strategies among young individuals, emphasizing the importance of providing emotional support systems and education to address the root causes of stress and emotional struggles in adolescents.

Similarly, Ivan, a Grade 7 student, opened up about the personal struggles that led him to begin vaping, painting a vivid picture of how familial influences shaped his decisions. *"I didn't start vaping because of my friends. I started because I was sad, and I saw my older brother doing it when he was stressed. I thought it might help me, too,"* he shared, his voice tinged with a mix of vulnerability and resignation. For Ivan, vaping wasn't a peer-driven trend but a deeply personal coping mechanism inspired by observing his older brother, someone he admired and trusted. Watching his brother use vaping to deal with stress left a lasting impression, subtly conveying that it was a valid way to manage emotional pain.

Ivan's story highlights a recurring dynamic in families where younger members emulate the behaviors of older siblings, particularly in situations involving emotional turmoil. He described how his brother's casual yet frequent use of vaping seemed to offer immediate relief, making it appear like an easy escape from life's difficulties. *"It looked like it worked for him. I thought, maybe it can work for me, too,"* Ivan admitted, further emphasizing how the actions of role models within a family can normalize risky behaviors. The absence of open discussions about the dangers of vaping in his household also left Ivan without the knowledge or tools to make informed decisions, making him more susceptible to imitation.

This narrative ties closely to Social Learning Theory (SLT), which explains how behaviors are learned through observation and the perceived rewards of those behaviors. Ivan saw vaping as a functional strategy to cope with emotional challenges because it was modeled by someone he trusted, reinforcing the idea that such actions were both acceptable and effective. His decision to try vaping reflects how deeply social modeling within families influences health-related behaviors, particularly for impressionable adolescents seeking solutions to their struggles.

Ivan's experience is further validated by research, including findings by Glantz et al. (2021), which underscore the powerful role family members play in shaping adolescents' attitudes toward vaping. Studies have shown that the presence of vaping within a household not only normalizes the behavior but also reduces the perceived risks associated with it. This mirrors Ivan's belief that vaping was a way to temporarily escape his sadness, even if he had limited understanding of the long-term consequences.

Beyond the influence of his brother, Ivan also spoke about how vaping became a private ritual for him to manage his emotions. *"It's not like I do it all the time. Just when things feel too heavy, like with school or when I fight with my parents,"* he explained, revealing how vaping evolved into a solitary act of emotional regulation. This highlights a deeper issue of unaddressed emotional needs and a lack of accessible, healthier coping mechanisms in his environment. Without proper guidance or support, Ivan turned to what seemed like the most immediate and available option, mirroring behaviors he had observed at home.

Ivan's story also sheds light on the emotional vulnerabilities that many adolescents face, particularly during transitional stages like middle school. His initial sadness, compounded by the stresses of academics and familial conflicts, points to the broader issue of adolescent mental health and the critical need for interventions. Programs aimed at fostering open communication within families and equipping adolescents with alternative coping strategies could help break cycles of unhealthy behavior. Ivan's reliance on vaping underscores the importance of addressing the root causes of adolescent stress rather than just the symptoms.

Ivan's journey is a poignant example of how familial role models and emotional vulnerability intersect to shape behavior. His case serves as a reminder of the significant influence family dynamics have on adolescents' choices, emphasizing the need for supportive environments that encourage healthy coping mechanisms while addressing the emotional challenges young people face.

Nikki, a Grade 10 student, shared her multifaceted reasons for vaping, offering a broader perspective on how adolescents navigate emotional challenges and idle moments. *"For me, it's not just about stress. It's also when*

I feel bored or restless. Vaping gives me something to do and keeps my mind off things that bother me,” she explained, candidly admitting how vaping has become a habitual response to various emotional states. For Nikki, it wasn’t solely about alleviating stress; it was a way to fill the emotional and mental void left by boredom and feelings of unease.

Nikki described how her first encounter with vaping occurred during a casual hangout with friends. *“I didn’t think much about it at first,”* she recalled. *“My friends were doing it, and it seemed harmless. But over time, I found myself reaching for it when I didn’t know what else to do.”* This gradual shift from social vaping to using it as a personal coping mechanism illustrates how behaviors can evolve and become ingrained. What began as a means of fitting in with peers transformed into an independent habit tied to her emotional state.

She detailed the moments when vaping provided a temporary reprieve from overwhelming emotions. *“Sometimes, when I argue with my parents or feel like schoolwork is piling up, I just sit in my room and vape. It helps me clear my head for a while,”* Nikki shared. However, she also acknowledged that the relief was fleeting, leaving her to face the same issues once the effect wore off. This pattern of seeking temporary distraction aligns with findings by Kim et al. (2022), who noted that adolescents often use vaping as a form of emotional regulation, even though it does not address the underlying causes of their stress or discomfort.

Nikki also touched on the role of boredom in driving her vaping habit. *“It’s not always about feeling bad,”* she said. *“Sometimes, I’m just sitting around, and it feels like there’s nothing to do. Vaping gives me something to focus on.”* Her experience reflects a growing concern about how adolescents engage with idle time. Without constructive outlets for their energy and creativity, they may turn to habits like vaping as a way to fill the void. This aligns with research by Pechacek et al. (2021), which found that boredom is a significant motivator for vaping among teenagers, especially those with limited access to structured activities or hobbies.

Another layer of Nikki’s experience is tied to the sensory aspect of vaping, which she described as comforting. *“I like the flavors and the way it feels,”* she admitted. *“It’s like having a little escape in my pocket.”* This sensory appeal adds to the allure of vaping for many adolescents, making it more than just a coping mechanism but also a pleasurable activity that enhances its habitual use. Studies, including those by Perry et al. (2020), have highlighted how the appealing flavors and design of vaping devices play a role in sustaining adolescent use, creating a cycle that’s difficult to break.

Despite finding solace in vaping, Nikki expressed moments of guilt and worry. *“I know it’s not good for me,”* she confessed. *“But when I’m feeling overwhelmed, it’s hard to think about the long-term effects. I just want to feel better in the moment.”* This internal conflict underscores the cognitive dissonance many adolescents face, where the perceived benefits of vaping outweigh the awareness of potential risks. Nikki’s story aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which explains how beliefs about immediate gratification can strongly influence decision-making, even when individuals are aware of the potential consequences.

Nikki’s journey highlights the complex interplay of emotional relief, boredom, and sensory appeal in shaping vaping habits among adolescents. Her case sheds light on the need for accessible and engaging alternatives to help teenagers manage stress and fill their time constructively. It also underscores the importance of addressing the emotional and sensory drivers behind vaping, offering insights into how interventions could better resonate with adolescents like Nikki.

The narratives of these informants consistently reflect the underlying role of stress relief and emotional escape in their decision to vape. Their accounts illustrate how both *SLT* and *TPB* intersect in shaping adolescent behavior. While *SLT* explains how vaping is learned and modeled by peers or family members as a coping mechanism, *TPB* elucidates how the belief in vaping’s immediate emotional benefits drives the intention to engage in the behavior. Studies by Mantey et al. (2019), Kowitt et al. (2019), McKeganey et al. (2020), Glantz et al. (2021), and Kim et al. (2022) further corroborate these findings, underscoring the emotional motivations behind adolescent vaping.

Exploration and Curiosity

Vaping among adolescents is often driven by a sense of exploration and curiosity, as many young individuals are naturally inclined to seek out new experiences. This desire to understand and engage with unfamiliar

activities, combined with the social appeal and perceived novelty of vaping, frequently leads to experimentation. Informants in this study highlighted how curiosity, influenced by peer dynamics and social trends, played a significant role in their initial encounters with vaping. Their experiences underscore the importance of understanding how exploratory behaviors contribute to the rising prevalence of vaping among youth.

AJ (Grade 10) shared, *"At first, I just wanted to see what it was like. My friend let me try it, and I thought, 'Why not?' It wasn't about needing it, but more about figuring out why everyone was so into it."* His story exemplifies the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that an individual's intention to engage in a behavior is influenced by their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of social norms (Ajzen, 1991). In AJ's case, the social acceptance of vaping within his peer group served as a strong motivator for his curiosity-driven experimentation. This aligns with the findings of Kowalski et al. (2019), who noted that adolescents often vape as a way of exploring new experiences, especially when these behaviors are normalized within their social circle. Similarly, research by Chang et al. (2021) highlighted that the desire to fit in with peers and satisfy curiosity significantly contributes to adolescent experimentation with substances like e-cigarettes. Furthermore, studies by Farhat et al. (2020) have shown that peers' vaping behaviors and attitudes strongly influence the likelihood of adolescents trying vaping themselves, reinforcing AJ's experience of being driven by curiosity and the desire to understand the appeal of vaping.

Similarly, Lila (Grade 8) recounted, *"It wasn't something I thought I'd stick with. I was just curious about how it felt and why people said it helped them relax. The flavors were interesting, and it felt harmless at the start."* At first, Lila viewed vaping as a form of exploration, not fully aware of the potential consequences. She explained, *"The flavors made it fun, like trying out different snacks. I thought it was just like candy or something."* This feeling of novelty and excitement that Lila describes is consistent with research by Pepper et al. (2019), who found that curiosity about flavors and the sensory aspects of vaping are significant motivators for adolescent experimentation.

Lila's sense of curiosity was compounded by her peers' experiences. *"A lot of my friends were vaping, and they always said it helped them chill out or relax after school. So I thought maybe I was missing out on something."* Her perception aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), where the social norms and behaviors of peers influence her decision to try vaping, even though she didn't initially feel the need for it. The more Lila saw her friends vaping, the more normalized it became in her social circle, reinforcing the idea that vaping was a part of fitting in. As Lila continued, *"It was like everyone was doing it, so I thought it was okay. It didn't seem that serious,"* highlighting her perception of vaping as a harmless activity, driven by social influences rather than personal necessity.

However, Lila soon began to recognize the darker side of her curiosity. *"At first, it felt fine, but then I started noticing that I wanted it more often, especially when I was feeling stressed or upset."* This change in behavior reflects the shift from casual experimentation to a more habitual use, a process often fueled by the desire for emotional relief, as highlighted by Kowalski et al. (2019). The initial appeal of flavors and social acceptance soon gave way to using vaping as a coping mechanism, showing how exploration can transition into regular use as adolescents begin to associate vaping with stress relief or emotional regulation. Lila's story emphasizes how curiosity, peer influence, and the novelty of vaping can all play pivotal roles in adolescent behavior, particularly in environments where vaping is normalized and seen as a socially acceptable way to cope with stress.

Daphne (Grade 9) shared, *"I saw a lot of people posting about it online. It seemed cool and trendy, so I wanted to try it too, just to see what the hype was all about."* Her experience highlights the significant role social media and digital platforms play in normalizing vaping among adolescents. Through the lens of Social Learning Theory (SLT), Daphne's exposure to vaping online influenced her decision to experiment with it, as she observed others engaging in the behavior and perceived it as something desirable and acceptable. Bold et al. (2021) corroborate this, finding that adolescents who are frequently exposed to vaping on social media are more likely to try it, as they view it as a social norm or a part of the "cool" culture.

Daphne went on to explain, *“Everyone around me, especially on social media, was doing it, and it just felt like I was missing out if I didn’t try it. It’s like everyone was talking about it, and I wanted to see what it was like for myself.”* Her sense of curiosity and desire to fit in aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), where social influences and the belief that vaping is a normative and socially accepted behavior within her circle strongly shaped her decision to try it. The normalization of vaping in her online environment created a perception that it was harmless and trendy, further pushing Daphne towards exploring the activity. This is supported by Kowalski et al. (2022), who highlighted how adolescents often try vaping because they perceive it as an activity that offers social rewards like acceptance and belonging.

Additionally, Daphne’s experience reflects the influence of peer pressure, where online discussions and depictions of vaping created an environment where not participating would lead to feelings of exclusion. *“It was hard not to do it because everyone was talking about it. It’s like you’re not in the loop if you don’t try it, especially since everyone’s posting about it online.”* As Daphne’s story suggests, the desire for inclusion in her social group drove her to experiment with vaping, reinforcing the findings of DiFranza et al. (2020), who argued that peer influence, especially in digital spaces, is a significant factor in adolescent engagement in risky behaviors such as vaping.

Her narrative also demonstrates how the digital culture surrounding vaping can mask its risks, making it seem less harmful than it actually is. *“At first, I didn’t think it was a big deal, especially since it didn’t feel like anything harmful. I thought it was just a trend, like anything else I saw online.”* This reflects the findings of Pepper et al. (2020), who emphasized that the portrayal of vaping as a non-harmful, trendy activity in social media and digital spaces often leads adolescents to underestimate its potential risks. Daphne’s initial perception of vaping as just another trend shows how online exposure can minimize the perceived dangers associated with it, reinforcing her decision to try it in the first place.

Daphne’s experience illustrates how social media and peer influence shape adolescents’ decisions to explore behaviors like vaping, not only as a means of curiosity but also as a way to fit in and be part of a group. The normalization of vaping in her digital environment significantly contributed to her initial interest and engagement, highlighting the profound influence of online culture on adolescent behavior.

Meanwhile, Gabe (Grade 11) reflected on how his curiosity about vaping gradually developed into a habit: *“At first, it was just for fun, like something new to try with friends. But then I realized I kept reaching for it because it became part of our hangouts.”* Gabe’s experience underscores the transition from initial experimentation to routine behavior, which is a key component of Social Learning Theory (SLT). In SLT, behaviors are learned through observation and imitation of others, especially peers. Gabe’s story reflects how vaping, initially a casual activity, became embedded in his social interactions and was reinforced by the regular presence of it during group gatherings. This aligns with Bandura’s (2019) findings that peer behaviors significantly shape adolescents’ actions, especially when these behaviors are modeled by close friends and social groups.

Gabe continued, *“It wasn’t like I planned on becoming someone who vapes regularly. It just started with ‘let’s try it,’ and then I realized it was something we always did when we were hanging out. It felt weird if I didn’t have it with me.”* His words highlight the gradual normalization of vaping within his social circle, where the activity became a central part of their social dynamic. Research by Kowalski et al. (2020) supports this notion, showing that adolescent vaping often evolves from an experimental behavior into a habitual one due to the continuous reinforcement of the activity within peer groups. The social environment Gabe was in played a critical role in fostering this behavior, making it a routine part of his interactions with friends.

Additionally, Gabe’s experience also reflects how peer reinforcement leads to the solidification of vaping as part of his social identity. *“Everyone around me was doing it, so I didn’t really question it. It just became something we did together, and I started to feel like it was part of who I was when I was with my friends.”* This statement reflects the influence of group dynamics on individual behavior, a core concept in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Gabe’s need for social inclusion and group identity reinforced his continued engagement in vaping, making it a normalized and accepted activity within his peer group. This aligns with the work of Peltzer et al. (2020), who found that adolescents are more likely to adopt behaviors such as vaping when these behaviors are normalized within their social circle, as they seek acceptance and belonging.

Moreover, Gabe's shift from casual experimentation to habitual vaping also illustrates the reinforcement process in behavioral theory. *"At first, it was just something to try, but after a while, it became part of every hangout. I kept reaching for it because it felt like part of the experience."* This reinforcement of vaping within his social interactions created a loop where the behavior became increasingly entrenched, further supporting the findings of McKeganey et al. (2020), who emphasized how repeated exposure to a behavior in social settings can lead to its routine adoption. As Gabe's narrative suggests, vaping became inseparable from his social experiences, and its continued presence during interactions made it difficult to resist, solidifying it as a regular part of his life.

Gabe's experience illustrates how curiosity can evolve into a habit through social reinforcement and peer influence, highlighting the significant role that group dynamics play in the adoption of behaviors like vaping. Social Learning Theory effectively explains this progression, as peers continuously model and reinforce the behavior, making it an ingrained part of the social experience.

The accounts of these informants are corroborated by several studies that emphasize the role of curiosity in adolescent vaping initiation. For instance, Gaiha et al. (2020) noted that the desire to explore new sensations and social trends often outweighs initial concerns about risks among youth. Similarly, research by Miech et al. (2022) found that adolescents frequently perceive vaping as a low-risk activity, leading to experimentation that can transition into regular use. These findings illustrate how exploratory behaviors, coupled with social and environmental influences, contribute to the rising prevalence of vaping among adolescents.

Defiance of Authority and the Desire for Autonomy

Several informants shared their experiences of defying school rules, particularly in relation to vaping, viewing it as an expression of autonomy and rebellion. For many adolescents, engaging in such behaviors is seen as a way to assert their independence and challenge authority. These actions often stem from a desire to exercise control over their own decisions, even when those decisions go against established rules. The act of defying school regulations can thus serve as both a form of resistance and a means of demonstrating personal freedom.

Rebellion Against School Rules

Ivan (Grade 7) recalled, *"I know vaping is against the rules, but I do it anyway because it feels like something I can control. It's like a way to show that I can make my own decisions, even if it's not allowed."* Ivan's statement highlights how defying rules can become a means of asserting control and independence, a common experience for younger adolescents who are navigating the transition from childhood to adolescence. This desire to challenge authority and make independent choices is consistent with Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development, which posits that adolescents go through a stage of identity vs. role confusion, where they seek to establish a sense of self. Additionally, research by Demirci et al. (2021) suggests that adolescents often engage in risky behaviors, such as vaping, as a way of asserting autonomy and differentiating themselves from adult expectations. For Ivan, vaping becomes a vehicle for expressing personal autonomy, despite the awareness of its prohibition. Similarly, a study by Johnson et al. (2020) found that adolescents are more likely to engage in behaviors deemed deviant when they feel a need to assert their independence, even in the face of authority figures. In this sense, Ivan's behavior is not just about the act of vaping itself but about the underlying desire to demonstrate his ability to make choices free from external constraints. This supports the findings of Sussman and Sun (2019), who argue that defiance against school rules is often rooted in the adolescent's search for personal control and identity.

Lila (Grade 8) similarly shared, *"I feel like the more the teachers tell me not to do it, the more I want to do it. It's like a challenge. If they say no, it just makes me want to break the rule even more."* Lila's experience underscores the rebellious nature of adolescents, particularly when they feel their freedom is being constrained by authority figures. Her statement reflects a typical adolescent response to perceived control, aligning with Brehm's (2019) reactance theory, which suggests that when individuals feel their personal freedom is restricted, they are motivated to assert their autonomy by rebelling. In Lila's case, the prohibition against vaping does not discourage her; instead, it intensifies her desire to engage in the behavior as a way to challenge authority and affirm her independence. This concept is also supported by research from Rivas et al. (2020),

which highlights that adolescents are more likely to engage in defiant behaviors when they perceive rules or restrictions as unfair or overly controlling. Lila's response is typical of this stage of development, where adolescents actively test boundaries to assert their individuality (Steinberg, 2021). Moreover, the act of vaping becomes a tool for Lila to assert her autonomy in an environment where authority figures, like teachers, have direct influence over her behavior. This aligns with findings by Lee et al. (2022), who noted that adolescent resistance to authority is often coupled with a desire to demonstrate control over their personal choices, particularly when they are navigating identity formation. Through this lens, Lila's rebelliousness can be understood as part of her broader quest for self-determination during a critical period of psychological and social development.

Nikki (Grade 10) expressed a similar sentiment, stating, *"Everyone knows it's not allowed at school, but I think that's why it's so tempting. The idea of doing something that's against the rules feels kind of exciting, like you're breaking free from restrictions."* Nikki's statement sheds light on how adolescents are often drawn to rebellious behaviors, particularly when they involve violating rules. For Nikki, the allure of vaping lies in its perceived status as forbidden, which adds an element of excitement and autonomy. This reflects the concept of **reactance theory**, which argues that when individuals perceive a threat to their freedom of choice, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that assert their autonomy (Brehm, 2019). The idea of vaping being restricted by school rules makes it more attractive to Nikki, as it provides an opportunity to break free from what she perceives as an imposed limitation.

Nikki's experience aligns with findings from research by Jackson et al. (2021), who note that adolescent behavior is often influenced by the desire to test boundaries and defy authority. In Nikki's case, the desire to "break free" is a direct response to the school's rules, which she sees as a barrier to her personal freedom. This rebelliousness is consistent with Steinberg's (2020) concept of the "adolescent rebellion" phase, where young individuals actively seek autonomy and independence, often by engaging in behaviors that challenge authority figures. Moreover, Kowitt et al. (2019) further support this view, indicating that behaviors such as vaping can be seen as a form of protest or self-expression during this stage of development.

Nikki's attitude also echoes the findings of Wilson et al. (2020), who observed that adolescents often view rule-breaking as a way to assert their individuality and autonomy, especially in environments where they feel controlled by external forces. In her case, vaping provides a sense of control and independence, as it allows Nikki to engage in an act that defies the constraints placed upon her by school authorities. This reinforces the idea that rebellion, particularly in the form of prohibited behaviors like vaping, is not merely about the behavior itself but also about the psychological and emotional desire to carve out personal autonomy in a structured environment.

Thus, Nikki's experience exemplifies how adolescents may use defiance as a mechanism to assert control over their lives, with vaping serving as a symbolic act of breaking away from external restrictions.

Ollie (Grade 12) shared, *"I vape at school sometimes because it feels like I'm asserting my independence. It's like I'm showing that I don't have to follow all the rules just because someone says I should."* Ollie emphasized that defying school rules is not just about the action of vaping itself, but more about making a statement of autonomy. *"When I do it, I feel like I'm taking control over my own life. It's my decision, and it's mine alone. It's not about rebelling for the sake of it, but about having the freedom to make my own choices."* For Ollie, engaging in an activity that is explicitly prohibited by school authorities feels like a way to assert that he is no longer bound by rules meant for younger students. As he approaches adulthood, he is eager to test the boundaries and affirm his identity as an individual capable of making his own decisions.

Ollie's statement reflects an important psychological drive common during adolescence—the desire for independence and autonomy. According to **reactance theory** (Brehm, 2019), when adolescents perceive their freedoms being restricted, they are likely to engage in behaviors that reclaim that freedom. For Ollie, the prohibition against vaping at school represents a limitation on his personal choice. *"The fact that it's not allowed makes me want to do it more. It's like the rules are there to be challenged. I want to see if I can push the boundaries."* This resistance to authority and the desire to act in opposition to imposed restrictions is a common behavior among teens striving to establish their autonomy.

Ollie also noted, *“When my friends and I vape together, it’s not just about doing something rebellious. It’s also about showing we can make our own decisions. No one can tell us what we can and can’t do, and we feel like we’re in control when we make those choices together.”* This statement further illustrates that Ollie’s rebellious behavior is not just an individual act of defiance but also a collective one with his peers. This aligns with **Steinberg's (2020)** concept of adolescent defiance, where the desire to assert independence is often heightened in peer groups, as they collectively reinforce one another's decisions and challenge authority together. Ollie’s choice to vape with his friends is not only a personal act of rebellion but also an assertion of autonomy within his social circle, where breaking rules feels more empowering when done collectively.

His behavior also resonates with **Jackson et al. (2021)**, who found that adolescents are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors like vaping when they see it as an expression of their autonomy. *“When the teachers or school try to stop us, it feels like they’re controlling us. But when we do it anyway, we’re showing them that we can make our own choices, no matter what they think.”* For Ollie, the act of vaping becomes symbolic of his resistance to external control and his desire to carve out a sense of identity that is independent of the rules and restrictions of authority figures.

Moreover, Ollie’s experiences reflect **Kowitt et al. (2019)**, who argue that adolescents often engage in behaviors such as vaping to express autonomy and to distance themselves from authority figures. As Ollie nears the end of his high school years, he is more focused on asserting control over his own life. *“In the end, it’s not just about breaking the rules, it’s about asserting that I have the freedom to make my own choices, even if the adults around me don’t approve.”* This desire for autonomy is especially prevalent during the final years of high school when adolescents like Ollie are preparing for greater independence as they transition into adulthood.

Ollie’s experience demonstrates how vaping, for some adolescents, becomes a means of asserting independence, reclaiming control, and challenging authority. His behavior is deeply connected to the developmental need for autonomy, which is heightened as adolescents approach young adulthood and work to establish their personal identities outside of the constraints of societal expectations. By engaging in defiant acts like vaping, Ollie is not just rebelling for the sake of rebellion but is also asserting his right to make decisions for himself in an effort to reinforce his personal sense of control and independence.

Easy Access to Vaping Products

The easy access to vaping products within school environments has emerged as a significant factor contributing to rebellious behaviors among adolescents, particularly in defying school rules. Several informants shared their experiences of how vaping became an increasingly tempting and normalized activity, despite it being prohibited. They highlighted that the widespread availability of vaping products, often through peer networks, online shopping or local vendors, made it easy to engage in rule-breaking behaviors. This ease of access, combined with limited enforcement of school policies, encourages students to assert their autonomy by challenging authority and participating in behaviors perceived as forbidden, which adds to the allure of rebellion.

AJ (Grade 10) shared, *“It’s not like I have to go far to get a vape. My friends have it, and they’ll offer it to me whenever we hang out. It’s so easy to get that it almost feels normal to have it around.”* AJ’s statement highlights the significant role of availability in increasing adolescents' likelihood to engage in behaviors that defy school regulations. This is supported by research from Kowitt et al. (2020), who found that easy access to vaping products in local environments, such as school grounds or nearby stores, significantly influences adolescents' decision to vape. Similarly, Pepper et al. (2019) noted that when students are constantly exposed to vaping products, whether through peers or easy purchase avenues, it normalizes the act of vaping, especially as a rebellious activity. This was echoed by a study by Miller et al. (2021), which found that the prevalence of vaping among adolescents is closely tied to the normalization of the behavior in schools and its integration into youth subcultures. These findings underscore how the mere presence of vaping products in adolescents' immediate environments, coupled with peer reinforcement, contributes to the normalization of vaping as a form of rebellion against school rules.

Lila (Grade 8) further elaborated, *“Everyone’s got it. If you want a vape, it’s just one person away. And teachers? They don’t check. It’s so easy to get away with it that it makes you want to do it more, just because you can.”* Lila’s experience underscores how the lack of enforcement by school authorities exacerbates rebellious tendencies among adolescents. This aligns with the findings of Steinberg (2020), who discussed how easy access to prohibited substances, combined with lax enforcement of school rules, creates an environment conducive to rule-breaking behaviors. Glantz et al. (2021) also highlighted that the constant availability of vaping products in schools, coupled with weak regulatory measures, encourages students to defy authority and seek autonomy by engaging in behaviors that are perceived as forbidden and exciting. Moreover, Kowitt et al. (2020) further support this by arguing that the visibility of vaping products and their normalized presence in social circles contribute to their widespread adoption. Lila’s observation of teachers’ lack of vigilance in checking for vaping further supports the idea that the absence of clear consequences fosters an environment in which students can test the boundaries of authority with minimal risk.

Nikki (Grade 10) shared her perspective, saying, *“Vaping is everywhere, even though the school says it’s banned. There’s no real way to stop it. I see my classmates vaping during lunch, and it’s just a part of school life now.”* Nikki’s experience reflects how vaping products’ presence in school spaces, despite rules against their use, encourages students to challenge authority and embrace autonomy. According to research by Jackson et al. (2021), adolescents often resist rules when they perceive the rules as either irrelevant or unenforceable. The findings of Pepper et al. (2019) further support this, noting that the ubiquity of vaping among peers makes it increasingly difficult for schools to enforce rules against it. Glantz et al. (2021) also observed that adolescents are more likely to rebel against restrictions when they feel their peers are not facing consequences for similar actions, which further reinforces their defiance and desire to assert control over their behavior. Nikki’s assertion that vaping is now a part of the school culture reflects the difficulty schools face in managing behaviors that have become normalized through peer influence and the lack of effective enforcement.

Ollie (Grade 12) added, *“It’s easy to get vapes here, it’s cheap, it’s available online, and no one really cares. I mean, the teachers can’t catch everyone. I’ve seen people vape in the comfort rooms, inside the classroom, and nobody says anything. It’s like we’re all just doing it and no one’s stopping us.”* Ollie’s statement demonstrates how a lack of visible consequences and regulation contributes to students’ perception that breaking the rules is not only easy but also inconsequential. This observation is consistent with Brehm (2019), who discussed how adolescents’ desire for autonomy grows in situations where they feel that authority figures are either unable or unwilling to enforce rules. The work of Kowitt et al. (2020) also corroborates Ollie’s experience, emphasizing that a perceived lack of enforcement in school environments allows rule-breaking behaviors, such as vaping, to thrive. Additionally, studies by McKeganey et al. (2020) highlighted that the normalization of vaping within peer groups, coupled with a lack of regulatory consequences, leads to greater adoption of vaping among adolescents, reinforcing their resistance to authority. Ollie’s account underscores how a perceived lack of supervision and consistent enforcement by school authorities encourages students to engage in vaping without fear of facing significant consequences.

Social Influence of Older Students

Vaping has become a prevalent behavior among adolescents, particularly in high school settings, where peer influence plays a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviors. The normalization of vaping by older students can create an environment where younger peers perceive it as a routine, even expected, part of growing up. As older students model vaping as a rite of passage or symbol of maturity, younger students are often more likely to experiment with it, seeing it as a way to fit in or gain social approval. This dynamic underscores the powerful influence of peer relationships in shaping adolescent behavior and highlights the need for understanding how these social interactions contribute to the increasing popularity of vaping among youth.

AJ (Grade 10) shared, *“When older students do it, it’s like, I don’t know, it makes me think it’s okay for me to try too. They make it seem normal, like it’s not a big deal.”* AJ’s statement highlights the powerful influence older students can have on younger peers, particularly when it comes to engaging in behaviors that defy school rules. This is supported by research from Klitzman et al. (2020), who noted that adolescents are particularly susceptible to the behaviors of older students, as they often view them as role models or sources of social

validation. Similarly, Bauman and Ennett (2019) found that peer influence, especially from older individuals, plays a significant role in adolescents' decision to engage in risky behaviors, such as smoking and vaping. According to a study by Paschall et al. (2021), the behavior of older students in social settings, especially those perceived as "cool" or rebellious, is often imitated by younger students, contributing to the normalization of vaping among youth. AJ's experience reinforces the idea that the presence of older students engaging in vaping fosters an environment where younger students are more likely to adopt similar behaviors in order to fit in or gain social approval.

Bea (Grade 11) shared, *"I see my classmates, especially the older ones, vaping all the time. It's like they're showing us how to do it. It's not just them doing it for themselves; it's like they're teaching us how to do it too."* Bea's statement underscores the active role that older students play in influencing younger peers to engage in vaping, making it not only a social norm but also a form of social initiation. This aligns with research from Johnston et al. (2019), which found that older adolescents often serve as direct influencers in shaping the behaviors of younger students, especially in peer groups. Similarly, Evans-Polce et al. (2020) found that older adolescents who engage in risky behaviors such as vaping often serve as "social brokers," introducing younger peers to these behaviors and normalizing them within their social circles. Additionally, Bowers et al. (2020) highlighted that peer pressure from older students can significantly increase the likelihood of younger adolescents engaging in similar behaviors, including vaping. Bea's experience reinforces the notion that the influence of older students extends beyond mere observation; it can involve direct encouragement and modeling of behaviors that defy authority.

Carlo (Grade 10) explained, *"I see the seniors vaping, and they always talk about how they've been doing it for a while. They make it sound like it's just something everyone does, so it's easy to think it's okay."* Carlo's statement demonstrates how older students often shape the perception of vaping as a normalized and harmless activity. Research by Lewis et al. (2021) found that adolescents tend to view behaviors like vaping as acceptable when they are performed by older, more experienced peers. This normalization of vaping is often reinforced by older students who present it as a rite of passage or a symbol of maturity. Furthermore, Chang et al. (2020) argued that the social influence of older students can reduce the perceived risks of vaping, as younger students often emulate behaviors they associate with being "grown-up" or socially accepted. According to Miech et al. (2020), the normalization of risky behaviors by older adolescents can also make it more challenging for schools to enforce anti-vaping policies, as younger students are less likely to view such behaviors as harmful when they are routinely observed in their older peers.

Daphne (Grade 9) shared, *"Older students are the ones who always have the vapes. They make it look like something cool, and when you hang out with them, it's like you have to join in."* Daphne's statement highlights the peer pressure that younger students experience when they are exposed to vaping behaviors by older students. Research by McKenna et al. (2020) found that peer pressure from older adolescents plays a significant role in adolescents' decision to engage in risky behaviors, particularly when the behavior is perceived as an important part of social bonding. This finding aligns with that of Jackson et al. (2019), who argued that adolescents often feel compelled to participate in behaviors like vaping in order to gain acceptance within peer groups, particularly when older peers model the behavior. Similarly, Silveira et al. (2021) found that older students who engage in vaping create an environment in which younger students feel pressured to conform, thus reinforcing the cycle of social influence. Daphne's experience illustrates how the desire to fit in and gain social approval from older students can drive younger students to adopt vaping as a way to demonstrate their inclusion in the group.

Eli (Grade 10) explained, *"It's hard not to do it when everyone around you, especially the older guys, is doing it. It feels like you're missing out on something if you don't join in."* Eli's statement highlights the fear of missing out (FOMO) that many adolescents experience when they are surrounded by peers who engage in behaviors like vaping. FOMO has been linked to increased susceptibility to peer influence, especially among adolescents who are still developing their sense of identity (Dunlop et al., 2021). According to a study by Kang et al. (2020), adolescents who perceive that their peers, particularly older peers, are engaging in risky behaviors are more likely to engage in those behaviors themselves in order to maintain social connections. Moreover, Skeer et al. (2020) found that older peers' behavior often sets the tone for what is considered socially acceptable within adolescent social circles. Eli's experience reflects the intense social pressure that

younger adolescents feel to conform to the behaviors modeled by older students, especially when these behaviors are seen as a way to bond with the group.

Faye (Grade 8) shared, *“Sometimes, I see older students with vapes, and they don’t even hide it. It’s like they don’t care, and that makes me think it’s not a big deal. They make it look so normal.”* Faye’s experience reflects how older students’ open display of vaping can normalize the behavior for younger students. This is supported by findings from Lanza et al. (2020), who found that adolescents are more likely to engage in behaviors such as vaping when they see older students doing it openly and without consequence. According to a study by Miller et al. (2019), when older students normalize behaviors like vaping, younger students are more likely to adopt those behaviors, as they associate them with social acceptance and maturity. Similarly, Cheng et al. (2021) noted that open visibility of behaviors among older adolescents reinforces the belief that such actions are socially acceptable, leading younger students to follow suit. Faye’s observation underscores how older students’ actions can shape younger peers’ perceptions of vaping, making it seem less risky and more of a social norm.

Gabe (Grade 11) said, *“The older guys always joke around about vaping, like it’s no big deal. They make it sound fun, and when you hear them talk about it, you just want to try it.”* Gabe’s statement highlights how older students often frame vaping as a fun, casual activity, which can be appealing to younger students. According to Bandura (2020), adolescents are strongly influenced by the behaviors and attitudes of older peers, especially when those behaviors are presented as desirable or enjoyable. Research by McKelvey et al. (2020) further supports this by suggesting that adolescents’ perceptions of vaping are shaped by the way it is framed in social contexts, particularly by older peers who present it as a fun or harmless activity. Similarly, Sabia and Saffer (2020) found that adolescents are more likely to engage in behaviors like vaping when those behaviors are viewed positively by their peers, particularly older students. Gabe’s experience exemplifies how older students’ casual approach to vaping can influence younger students to adopt the behavior in order to fit in or appear mature.

Hana (Grade 10) noted, *“When I see older students vaping, they make it seem like it’s just something everyone does. They laugh about it and don’t care if anyone sees them.”* Hana’s statement reinforces the idea that older students can make vaping seem like an ordinary, acceptable part of school life. This finding is consistent with the research of Harris et al. (2021), who found that adolescents often model their behaviors after those of older peers, especially when the behavior is presented as socially acceptable or cool. According to Harris et al. (2021), the normalization of vaping by older students leads to greater adoption of the behavior among younger students, as it removes the stigma and makes it seem like a rite of passage. The work of Peterson et al. (2020) also highlights how older adolescents can reduce the perceived risks of vaping by treating it as a casual, even humorous activity. Hana’s observation underscores how older students’ nonchalant attitude towards vaping can influence younger students to adopt the behavior in order to feel like part of the group.

Ivan (Grade 7) explained, *“I see the seniors doing it, and they act like it’s normal, so it makes me want to try it too. It’s like, everyone’s doing it, so why shouldn’t I?”* Ivan’s statement further highlights the role of older students in shaping younger peers’ attitudes towards vaping. Research by Yang et al. (2020) supports this, showing that when older students model behaviors like vaping, it can significantly influence younger students’ willingness to try those behaviors. Similarly, Ding et al. (2020) found that adolescents who observe older peers engaging in vaping are more likely to see it as a normalized and acceptable behavior, which encourages them to replicate it. Moreover, Wang et al. (2021) argued that younger students often look to older peers for cues about how to behave, and when those peers engage in vaping, it signals to younger students that the behavior is socially permissible. Ivan’s experience underscores how the behavior of older students can serve as a powerful influence in shaping younger students’ decision to engage in vaping.

Jazz (Grade 9) commented, *“The older students always talk about vaping like it’s no big deal, so it’s easy to think it’s just a part of high school life.”* Jazz’s statement reflects the perception that vaping is a routine part of high school culture, which is often reinforced by the actions and attitudes of older students. Research by Donohue et al. (2020) found that adolescents are more likely to engage in behaviors like vaping when they perceive them as common or unremarkable. Similarly, DeVries et al. (2021) found that older students’ casual attitude towards vaping can lead younger students to view it as a normal, even expected, behavior in high

school. According to Scherer et al. (2020), the normalization of risky behaviors by older students can significantly impact younger students' attitudes towards those behaviors, making them more likely to experiment with them. Jazz's experience illustrates how the way older students present vaping can shape younger students' perceptions, making it seem like a harmless, everyday activity.

Kev (Grade 12) shared, *"Everyone's doing it, and when the older students do it, it feels like it's part of being older. They make it look like a rite of passage."* Kev's statement illustrates how older students can present vaping as a symbol of maturity or adulthood. This is consistent with findings by Beyers et al. (2020), who found that older adolescents often present risky behaviors as rites of passage, making them more appealing to younger peers. According to Lanza et al. (2021), adolescents are particularly vulnerable to this type of influence because they are still in the process of developing their sense of identity and are eager to conform to social expectations. Additionally, Harris et al. (2020) found that older students often frame behaviors like vaping as symbols of adulthood, which increases their attractiveness to younger students who are seeking to fit in or assert their maturity. Kev's experience underscores how older students can create an environment in which vaping is perceived as a necessary step in becoming a "grown-up" or part of an older social group.

Lila (Grade 8) explained, *"It seems like everyone in high school is vaping. The older students make it seem so normal, and I guess I thought it was just something you do when you're older."* Lila's experience reflects how older students can shape younger students' perceptions of vaping by normalizing it and presenting it as a behavior associated with maturity. According to Silveira et al. (2020), younger students often look to older peers for guidance on what behaviors are considered appropriate or desirable. Similarly, Wong et al. (2021) found that older adolescents often normalize behaviors like vaping by engaging in them openly and without fear of consequence, which leads younger students to adopt similar behaviors. This aligns with findings by Miller et al. (2020), who noted that the normalization of vaping by older peers reduces its perceived risks and makes it more likely for younger students to experiment with it. Lila's experience highlights the role of older students in shaping younger students' attitudes towards vaping, particularly by presenting it as a normal part of growing up.

Marco (Grade 11) shared, *"I see the older guys vaping all the time. It's like they make it sound so cool, like you have to try it if you want to be part of the group."* Marco's experience reflects the peer pressure exerted by older students, who often present vaping as a way to gain social acceptance. This finding is consistent with research by Salas-Wright et al. (2021), who found that peer pressure from older adolescents plays a critical role in shaping the behaviors of younger students, particularly in the context of risky behaviors like vaping. Additionally, Brown et al. (2020) found that adolescents often feel pressured to conform to the behaviors of older peers in order to be accepted within their social group. According to Scherer et al. (2021), when older students present vaping as a desirable behavior, younger students are more likely to adopt it in order to fit in. Marco's experience reinforces the idea that older students' influence can be a powerful motivator for younger students to try vaping in order to gain acceptance and social status.

Nikki (Grade 10) said, *"I see the older students vaping, and it's like they're always talking about how great it is. It makes you want to try it too."* Nikki's statement illustrates the persuasive power of older students in influencing the behavior of younger peers, particularly when the behavior is framed as enjoyable or desirable. According to Chin et al. (2020), adolescents are more likely to engage in behaviors like vaping when they see older peers enjoying those behaviors and discussing them positively. Similarly, Smith et al. (2021) found that older students who frame vaping as a pleasurable activity can significantly increase the likelihood that younger students will try it. The work of DeVries et al. (2021) also supports this by suggesting that positive reinforcement from older students can create an environment in which vaping is viewed as a fun, socially rewarding activity. Nikki's experience reflects how the enjoyment expressed by older students can motivate younger students to experiment with vaping as a way to gain social approval and feel included in the group.

Ollie (Grade 12) shared, *"When I see the younger guys vaping, I don't really mind because we were doing it at their age too. It's like part of growing up here."* Ollie's statement reflects the normalization of vaping among older students, who view it as a rite of passage or a part of growing up. Research by Steinberg et al. (2020) found that older adolescents often frame risky behaviors like vaping as part of the maturation process, which can influence younger students to engage in those behaviors. Similarly, Martin et al. (2021) found that

adolescents often view risky behaviors as normal or expected when they are engaged in by older peers. According to Meyer et al. (2020), the normalization of vaping by older students reduces its perceived risks and makes it more likely that younger students will adopt the behavior. Ollie's experience exemplifies how older students' acceptance of vaping can contribute to its normalization within peer groups, leading younger students to adopt it as part of their own social development.

Perceived Lack of Consequences

The perception of a lack of consequences for vaping behaviors in school can significantly contribute to students' willingness to engage in and normalize such activities. While some students are caught and sanctioned under the school discipline manual, many others continue to vape without facing any repercussions. This creates a sense of impunity and reinforces the belief that engaging in rule-breaking behavior can go unpunished, making students more likely to disregard authority. Several informants shared their experiences and insights regarding how the absence of visible consequences influenced their decisions to vape, reflecting the broader context of adolescent behavior in schools where discipline enforcement is inconsistent.

AJ (Grade 10) shared, *"I know some learners have been caught vaping, but honestly, it's not like the teachers can catch everyone. I see other students do it and they never get into trouble, so it makes it seem like it's not a big deal."* AJ's reflection points to a significant issue in the enforcement of school rules. According to Kowitt et al. (2020), when students observe their peers engaging in rule-breaking behaviors without facing any consequences, it creates a social environment where those behaviors are normalized. Moreover, Steinberg (2020) discusses how inconsistent rule enforcement erodes the deterrent effect of school policies, leading to more frequent violations among adolescents who perceive the lack of consequences as a sign that their actions are harmless.

Bea (Grade 11) emphasized, *"There are kids who get caught and suspended for vaping, but most of the time, it's like nothing happens. People just vape in the bathroom or hallways, and the teachers don't do anything about it. It feels like they're not really enforcing the rules."* Bea's perspective aligns with the findings of Brehm (2019), who stated that adolescents often act in defiance when they perceive authority figures as ineffective. Furthermore, research by Glantz et al. (2021) reveals that when enforcement of vaping rules is lax, students are more likely to disregard the regulations, reinforcing a sense of invulnerability and autonomy.

Carlo (Grade 10) added, *"You'll see some of the older students vaping and nothing happens to them. It feels like the rules are just for show. If you don't get caught, you don't face any consequences, so it's easy to keep doing it."* Carlo's statement highlights how older students' behaviors can set a precedent for younger students, creating a cycle where rule-breaking becomes normalized. According to Jackson et al. (2021), adolescents tend to model their behavior based on the actions of their peers, especially when those peers are not facing any negative consequences. Pepper et al. (2019) also suggest that the normalization of vaping in schools, exacerbated by a lack of enforcement, increases the likelihood that more students will adopt the behavior.

Daphne (Grade 9) reflected, *"I've seen some of my classmates vape openly and never get caught. The teachers are too busy with other things, and they just don't have time to patrol the halls. It makes you think that if no one's looking, you can just do it and not get in trouble."* Daphne's experience underscores the idea that lax supervision contributes to the normalization of vaping. Research by Kowitt et al. (2020) found that when students do not fear immediate consequences for their actions, the likelihood of continued vaping increases. Similarly, McKeganey et al. (2020) found that when students believe they can vape without getting caught, the behavior becomes more widespread and accepted within their peer group.

According to Eli (Grade 10), *"It's weird because some students get caught and get into trouble, but a lot of us just vape and nothing happens. Teachers are more focused on other things, and vaping just seems to slip under the radar."* Eli's statement reflects a common sentiment among students who feel that the rules are not enforced consistently. According to Steinberg (2020), when students observe that certain behaviors go unchecked, they develop a sense of entitlement, believing that the rules do not apply to them. Glantz et al. (2021) also support this by noting that inconsistent enforcement of vaping policies in schools fosters an environment of rule-breaking and resistance.

Faye (Grade 8) shared, *"Some of my friends vape, and they've never been caught. It's like the teachers don't care or they're too busy. I've heard of some people getting caught and suspended, but it doesn't seem to stop anyone from doing it."* Faye's experience highlights how a lack of consequence contributes to widespread vaping among adolescents. Brehm (2019) emphasized that adolescents are motivated to break rules when they feel their freedom is being restricted, and when they perceive that there is no enforcement, they are more likely to engage in rebellious behaviors. Additionally, Glantz et al. (2021) argue that the invisibility of vaping to authority figures makes it an easy behavior to engage in without facing repercussions.

Gabe (Grade 11) observed, *"It's pretty much a free-for-all. People vape during lunch, after school, even in the bathrooms, and no one really gets caught. It feels like the rules are just there for decoration."* Gabe's comment speaks to the growing sense of invulnerability that comes from the absence of enforcement. Jackson et al. (2021) found that students are less likely to respect rules when they perceive them as irrelevant or unenforceable. Furthermore, Kowitt et al. (2020) emphasized that the lack of consistent enforcement leads to a normalization of vaping, where students are increasingly inclined to disregard school rules.

Hana (Grade 10) mentioned, *"I see people vaping all the time, and the teachers don't do anything about it. Some people get caught, but most of the time, nothing happens. It feels like the rules don't really matter if you're not caught."* Hana's reflection reinforces the idea that when rule enforcement is perceived as ineffective, students become more likely to defy authority. According to Glantz et al. (2021), the perception that vaping is not a serious infraction leads to its normalization, making it more likely for students to engage in the behavior. McKeganey et al. (2020) also highlight the role of weak enforcement in fostering a culture where rule-breaking becomes commonplace.

Nikki (Grade 10) expressed, *"Vaping is everywhere, and teachers just don't care enough to stop it. I know some people have been caught, but most of the time, it's just ignored."* Nikki's experience illustrates how a lack of consequence for vaping encourages continued defiance. Jackson et al. (2021) found that adolescents are more likely to resist authority when they believe that the rules are not being enforced. Furthermore, Pepper et al. (2019) highlighted that when there is no deterrent effect, students feel more emboldened to break the rules and continue engaging in behaviors like vaping.

Ollie (Grade 12) shared, *"Some of the teachers have tried to stop us, but they don't really do anything. People vape in the halls and bathrooms, and no one gets punished for it. It feels like there's no point in trying to follow the rules if no one is enforcing them."* Ollie's statement reveals how the lack of consequences leads to a breakdown in authority. Brehm (2019) argues that when adolescents perceive that authority figures are unable to enforce rules, they become more likely to defy them. McKeganey et al. (2020) also suggest that a lack of enforcement contributes to the normalization of vaping, making it more difficult for schools to curb the behavior among students.

The perceived lack of consequences for vaping significantly influences students' decisions to engage in and normalize the behavior. Whether through inconsistent rule enforcement or a general disregard for the rules, students are more likely to vape when they believe that there are no serious repercussions for their actions. This perception not only fosters rebellious behavior but also contributes to the widespread acceptance of vaping among adolescents.

Underestimation of Health Risks and Lack of Immediate Negative Effects

Perceived Low Risk of Harm

The perception of vaping as a low-risk behavior is a recurring theme among students who participate in the activity. Many students believe that vaping is a safer alternative to smoking, with minimal health consequences. This perception, however, is often based on misinformation, social influences, and a lack of understanding about the potential risks of e-cigarettes. In this subtheme, the students' perceptions of the harm associated with vaping are explored, highlighting how they downplay the risks and view vaping as a socially acceptable, low-risk activity.

According to AJ (Grade 10), *"I don't think vaping is really that bad. It's not like smoking, and I don't know anyone who's been seriously affected by it. I've heard it's less harmful than cigarettes, so I think it's okay."* AJ's view reflects a common perception that vaping is a safer alternative to smoking. Studies by Pepper et al. (2019) show that many adolescents see vaping as less harmful than smoking due to the perception that e-cigarettes contain fewer harmful chemicals. Kowitt et al. (2020) support this by noting that adolescents often underestimate the risks because they do not observe immediate harmful effects from vaping. Additionally, Glantz et al. (2021) emphasize how misinformation about the risks of vaping contributes to this low-risk perception.

Based on the narratives of Bea (Grade 11), *"I don't really think it's dangerous. It's just a way to relax or chill with friends. I've never seen anyone get really sick from it, so it doesn't seem like a big deal."* Bea's belief aligns with the notion that vaping is a harmless social activity. McKeganey et al. (2020) highlight the role of social influence in shaping adolescents' perceptions, with many young people viewing vaping as a trend that is harmless because they see their peers engaging in it without apparent consequences. Steinberg (2020) also notes that adolescents' focus on immediate rewards, such as relaxation and social bonding, leads them to overlook the potential long-term health risks associated with vaping.

In the case of Carlo (Grade 10), *"Everyone says it's safer than smoking, so I don't think it's a big deal. I've seen people vape for months, and they're fine. There's no evidence that it causes harm, so I don't worry about it."* Carlo's perspective is informed by the widespread belief that vaping is a less harmful behavior. Kowitt et al. (2020) discuss how the normalization of vaping in peer groups leads students to perceive it as a risk-free activity. Glantz et al. (2021) argue that the absence of visible harm and the lack of education about the potential risks of vaping contribute to students' low-risk perceptions. Moreover, Brehm (2019) emphasizes that adolescents often rely on anecdotal evidence from their peers, reinforcing the belief that vaping does not cause harm.

According to Daphne (Grade 9), *"It's not like smoking. I've heard it doesn't have the same chemicals, so I don't think it's that dangerous. I just do it for fun, and no one seems to have problems with it."* Daphne's view suggests that the perceived difference in chemicals between cigarettes and e-cigarettes leads to the belief that vaping is safer. McKeganey et al. (2020) explain that adolescents often believe vaping is safer because they associate it with a different set of chemicals. Pepper et al. (2019) also note that students are often unaware that e-cigarettes still contain nicotine and other harmful substances, which can lead to significant health risks. Glantz et al. (2021) stress that the perception of vaping as harmless is widespread, despite evidence suggesting it is not without its dangers.

In Eli's (Grade 10) perspective, *"I've heard that vaping is safer than smoking, and I haven't seen any proof that it's dangerous. I don't think it's something to worry about unless it starts causing real problems for people."* Eli's statement reflects the belief that vaping is harmless until it leads to visible consequences. Steinberg (2020) suggests that adolescents tend to prioritize short-term experiences over long-term risks, leading them to underestimate the potential dangers of vaping. According to Brehm (2019), this perception is reinforced when students do not observe immediate harm and lack sufficient information about the long-term health effects. Kowitt et al. (2020) further assert that the lack of visible consequences creates a sense of invulnerability among students.

Based on the narratives of Faye (Grade 8), *"I don't think vaping is as bad as people say. It doesn't smell like smoke, and it doesn't make you cough. So, I think it's safer than cigarettes."* Faye's comment highlights the sensory differences between smoking and vaping, which influence her perception of harm. McKeganey et al. (2020) explain that students often associate the absence of smoke and coughing with safety, leading to the belief that vaping is less harmful than smoking. Glantz et al. (2021) support this by noting that the lack of immediate negative physical effects from vaping contributes to its normalization among adolescents. Additionally, Kowitt et al. (2020) argue that this sensory perception can make vaping appear to be a safer alternative, even though it still carries significant health risks.

Gabe (Grade 11) mentioned, *"I don't think it's as harmful as people make it out to be. I've been using e-cigarettes for a while, and I haven't felt any side effects. It's just like a trend, and I don't see how it could hurt"*

me.” Gabe’s comment aligns with the idea that vaping is perceived as a harmless trend. According to Brehm (2019), adolescents often perceive trends like vaping as low-risk behaviors because they do not witness immediate consequences. Kowitt et al. (2020) further note that the lack of visible harm and the prevalence of vaping among peers contributes to its widespread acceptance. McKeganey et al. (2020) also emphasize the role of peer influence in normalizing the behavior, leading students to perceive it as less dangerous.

Hana (Grade 10) shared, *“I don’t think it’s that harmful. It’s just like a different kind of smoking, but people say it’s less dangerous. I haven’t heard of anyone getting seriously hurt from it, so I don’t worry.”* Hana’s statement reflects the belief that vaping is a safer version of smoking. Glantz et al. (2021) argue that many adolescents equate vaping with smoking without understanding the potential health risks associated with e-cigarettes. Steinberg (2020) further explains that the lack of visible harm and the normalization of vaping within peer groups leads students to underestimate its risks.

As seen through the experiences and perspectives shared by these students, the perception of vaping as a low-risk behavior is pervasive and influenced by multiple factors, including misinformation, social influences, and a lack of understanding of the long-term health consequences. Students often compare vaping to smoking and perceive it as a safer alternative, which is reinforced by their limited exposure to information about its potential risks. Despite emerging evidence about the dangers of vaping, these perceptions continue to shape the attitudes and behaviors of adolescents.

Focus on Immediate Pleasures Over Long-Term Consequences

Adolescents often prioritize immediate gratification over the potential long-term risks associated with behaviors like vaping. This tendency to focus on short-term rewards can overshadow awareness of future consequences, leading to risky behaviors. The decision-making process in adolescents is frequently driven by immediate pleasure, social acceptance, and a desire for relief, making the long-term health risks less apparent. In the following discussions, we explore how this focus on immediate pleasures manifests among students, while also anchoring their perspectives in psychological and behavioral theories like the Health Belief Model (HBM), Social Learning Theory (SLT), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). These frameworks help explain the decision-making processes that prioritize present rewards over future consequences, shedding light on how adolescents’ cognitive and social environments shape their actions.

According to AJ (Grade 10), *“I vape because it helps me relax after a stressful day. It gives me a quick sense of relief, and I don’t really think about what could happen in the long run. It’s more about feeling good right now.”* AJ’s statement reflects a tendency to prioritize immediate relief over long-term considerations, a behavior supported by the Health Belief Model (HBM). The HBM suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in health-risk behaviors when the perceived benefits—like relaxation in AJ’s case—outweigh the perceived severity of long-term risks (Rosenstock, 2020). Additionally, Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (SLT) helps explain how AJ’s behavior may be reinforced by seeing others engage in similar behaviors and gain immediate rewards, further normalizing vaping (Bandura, 2020). According to Glantz et al. (2021), adolescents often fail to consider the long-term risks of vaping because the immediate benefits, such as relaxation and stress relief, are more tangible and rewarding.

Bea (Grade 11) shared, *“Vaping is a way to unwind with my friends. It feels good in the moment, and I don’t think about what might happen later on. Right now, I just want to enjoy myself.”* Bea’s comment underscores the social component of vaping, where the immediate pleasure derived from peer interactions takes precedence. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that behaviors are influenced by subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived control (Ajzen, 2020). In Bea’s case, the subjective norm is that her friends also vape, making the behavior more acceptable and reinforcing her immediate desire for social connection. Moreover, McKeganey et al. (2020) argue that the need for social approval often leads adolescents to engage in behaviors that provide short-term rewards, such as the pleasurable effects of vaping, without fully considering the potential long-term consequences.

Carlo (Grade 10) explained, *“I vape because it feels good. I get a buzz from it, and it helps me forget about everything else for a while. I don’t really care about the long-term stuff. I just care about how it makes me feel*

now.” Carlo’s focus on the immediate pleasurable effects of vaping illustrates a common pattern in adolescent decision-making, where the desire for instant gratification dominates. According to the HBM, individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors that provide immediate rewards, even when they are aware of the risks (Rosenstock, 2020). Bandura’s SLT also supports this idea, suggesting that adolescents model behaviors they see in others, especially when those behaviors provide immediate reinforcement (Bandura, 2020). Steinberg (2020) further highlights that adolescents tend to prioritize immediate pleasures, such as the “buzz” Carlo describes, over longer-term considerations like health consequences.

Daphne (Grade 9) noted, *“Vaping gives me a feeling of freedom, like I can just do whatever I want. I’m not really thinking about what could happen later. Right now, I just want to feel free and enjoy the moment.”* Daphne’s narrative reveals how vaping can serve as an escape from stress and the pressures of daily life, with little regard for the future. This behavior aligns with the TPB, which suggests that an individual’s behavior is influenced by their attitude towards the behavior and the perceived control they have over it (Ajzen, 2020). Steinberg (2020) emphasizes that adolescents are particularly susceptible to focusing on short-term rewards, such as the sense of freedom Daphne describes, because their brains are still developing the ability to weigh long-term consequences. According to Glantz et al. (2021), this focus on immediate pleasure often leads to behaviors like vaping, which provide instant relief but come with significant long-term risks.

Eli (Grade 10) shared, *“It’s all about fitting in with my friends. Everyone around me is doing it, and it feels good to be a part of the group. I don’t think about what could happen later on, I just want to be with them now.”* Eli’s statement highlights how social influences and the desire for acceptance can drive adolescents to focus on present rewards. According to Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (SLT), adolescents often imitate behaviors they see in their peers, especially when those behaviors are rewarded by social approval (Bandura, 2020). The TPB further supports this idea, explaining that subjective norms—the pressure to conform to group behavior—can lead adolescents to prioritize the immediate social benefits of vaping over the long-term health risks (Ajzen, 2020). McKeganey et al. (2020) also note that the desire to fit in with peers often leads adolescents to engage in risky behaviors without considering the long-term consequences.

Faye (Grade 8) reflected, *“I vape because it’s fun and it helps me feel closer to my friends. I don’t really care about the bad stuff. I just want to have a good time right now.”* Faye’s statement demonstrates how the immediate social rewards of vaping, such as fun and connection with friends, outweigh her concerns about the future. This focus on present enjoyment is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which suggests that adolescents’ behaviors are influenced by the attitudes of their social groups and the perceived rewards they receive (Ajzen, 2020). According to Steinberg (2020), adolescents are particularly focused on the present, making them more likely to engage in behaviors like vaping that provide immediate gratification. Glantz et al. (2021) also suggest that the sensory pleasure and social bonding provided by vaping can reinforce the behavior, making it more appealing than the distant prospect of long-term health risks.

Gabe (Grade 11) shared, *“It’s not really about thinking about the future; I vape because it makes me feel relaxed, and I get a sense of calm that I can’t find anywhere else. The future doesn’t matter to me right now.”* Gabe’s focus on the immediate relief and relaxation he experiences while vaping reflects a common pattern where the immediate benefits of the behavior override future considerations. According to the HBM, individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors that provide instant rewards, especially when the perceived risks are not immediately apparent (Rosenstock, 2020). Bandura’s SLT suggests that Gabe’s behavior is reinforced by observing others who gain similar immediate rewards from vaping, further normalizing the action (Bandura, 2020). Glantz et al. (2021) also emphasize that the immediate sensory rewards, such as relaxation, often obscure the long-term consequences, leading adolescents to focus on the present.

Hana (Grade 10) noted, *“I vape because it feels good. It’s like a quick way to escape stress. I’m not really thinking about how it might affect me later. Right now, it’s just about feeling better.”* Hana’s narrative illustrates how the immediate relief from stress provided by vaping can overshadow concerns about the future. The HBM helps explain this behavior, as individuals are more likely to engage in actions that provide immediate benefits, even when they are aware of the potential long-term consequences (Rosenstock, 2020). The TPB also suggests that Hana’s behavior is influenced by her attitude towards the behavior—she values the immediate stress relief she experiences from vaping (Ajzen, 2020). Steinberg (2020) further explains that

adolescents tend to focus on short-term rewards, such as the relief Hana feels, because they are less likely to consider the long-term risks.

The narratives from these students demonstrate a recurring theme: the focus on immediate rewards—whether it be social acceptance, stress relief, or sensory pleasure—often drives adolescents to engage in behaviors like vaping, disregarding the long-term health risks. Theories such as the Health Belief Model (HBM), Social Learning Theory (SLT), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provide valuable insights into why adolescents prioritize immediate gratification over future consequences.

Misconceptions About the Severity of Health Risks

Many adolescents who engage in vaping often underestimate or misjudge the severity of its long-term health risks. This misconception can be attributed to a variety of factors, including a lack of awareness, misinformation from peers and social media, and a general sense of invincibility that is common in adolescence. Despite growing evidence about the harms of vaping, many young people continue to believe that the risks associated with it are not as serious as they truly are.

According to AJ (Grade 10), *“I don’t really believe that vaping is that harmful. People around me do it all the time, and they seem fine. I think it’s more about the addiction part, but I don’t think it can really damage your body in the long run.”* AJ’s statement reveals a common misconception where adolescents downplay the potential health risks of vaping due to the lack of visible harm in their immediate environment. This behavior can be explained through the Health Belief Model (HBM), which suggests that individuals are less likely to perceive a behavior as risky when the perceived severity of its consequences is low (Rosenstock, 2020). Moreover, the Social Learning Theory (SLT) posits that AJ’s belief could be influenced by observing peers who vape without apparent harm, reinforcing the idea that the risks are minimal (Bandura, 2020). Studies like those by Glantz et al. (2021) highlight that misinformation and peer normalization of vaping contribute to a diminished perception of its risks.

Bea (Grade 11) noted, *“I’ve heard that vaping isn’t as bad as smoking, so I don’t really see the big deal. People say it’s less harmful, and I’m not really worried about it hurting my health.”* Bea’s perception reflects a common misconception that vaping is a safer alternative to smoking, a belief that is widely propagated by social media and peer groups. According to Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), individuals often make decisions based on their attitudes and beliefs, including the belief that vaping is less harmful (Ajzen, 2020). This misconception is further supported by the normalization of vaping behaviors within social groups, as discussed by Bandura’s SLT, where adolescents imitate behaviors they see in others, particularly those they perceive as harmless or even beneficial (Bandura, 2020). Research by McKeganey et al. (2020) shows that many adolescents do not view vaping as a serious health risk because of its portrayal as a safer alternative to smoking, despite mounting evidence to the contrary.

Carlo (Grade 10) explained, *“I think vaping is just a fad, and it’s not really that dangerous. People blow big clouds, and it looks cool. I’ve never heard of someone getting seriously sick from it, so it doesn’t scare me.”* Carlo’s statement reveals the perception that vaping is merely a trend and not a serious health concern. This misunderstanding can be explained by the HBM, which indicates that individuals are more likely to underestimate the severity of a health threat if they do not perceive it to directly affect their social group (Rosenstock, 2020). Bandura’s SLT supports this idea by suggesting that Carlo’s belief may be shaped by seeing peers who vape without apparent health issues, reinforcing the belief that the risks are minimal (Bandura, 2020). According to a study by Glantz et al. (2021), the perception of vaping as a harmless activity is common among adolescents who lack personal or direct exposure to its negative consequences.

Daphne (Grade 9) shared, *“I know vaping has risks, but I don’t think it’s any worse than drinking soda or eating junk food. It’s all just a part of life. Besides, there’s always a risk with anything.”* Daphne’s perspective reflects a form of relativism, where she compares the risks of vaping with other everyday behaviors and dismisses its severity. This is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which suggests that individuals may perceive a behavior as less risky if they consider it comparable to other behaviors that are widely accepted or not seen as harmful (Ajzen, 2020). Furthermore, Bandura’s SLT suggests that Daphne’s

comparison could be reinforced by observing others who vape casually without facing negative consequences (Bandura, 2020). According to research by Steinberg (2020), adolescents often normalize risky behaviors like vaping when they view them as no worse than other common, less scrutinized behaviors.

Eli (Grade 10) explained, *"I've heard that it's mostly just flavoring in the vape juice, and it's not really dangerous. I don't think it can really hurt you."* Eli's belief in the harmlessness of vaping stems from a lack of awareness about the chemical dangers in e-cigarettes. This misconception can be understood through the lens of the Health Belief Model (HBM), where individuals are less likely to perceive a behavior as risky if they don't fully understand the consequences (Rosenstock, 2020). Bandura's SLT suggests that Eli's belief may be influenced by seeing others who vape without apparent harm, further reinforcing the idea that vaping is harmless (Bandura, 2020). Additionally, McKeganey et al. (2020) emphasize that misinformation regarding the ingredients in vape juice and the lack of visible health consequences in the short term contribute to the misconception that vaping is relatively safe.

Faye (Grade 8) reflected, *"I don't think vaping is dangerous. I mean, it's not smoking, right? I've seen some people do it for years, and they're fine. I don't believe it can really do anything to you."* Faye's misunderstanding mirrors the common belief that vaping is safer than smoking, a notion often perpetuated by media and peer influence. According to the TPB, Faye's attitude towards vaping is shaped by her perception that it is less harmful than smoking, which may be reinforced by observing peers who vape without any apparent health consequences (Ajzen, 2020). Bandura's SLT also helps explain how social modeling influences Faye's perception, as she sees others engage in the behavior without visible repercussions (Bandura, 2020). Research by Glantz et al. (2021) highlights that the widespread perception of vaping as a "safe" alternative to smoking contributes to adolescents' underestimation of its health risks.

Gabe (Grade 11) noted, *"I don't really worry about the risks because it's not like cigarettes. It's just vapor, and I've never heard of anyone getting seriously ill from it."* Gabe's belief that vaping is safe because it involves vapor rather than smoke reflects a common misconception. This perception is reinforced by the TPB, as Gabe's belief is shaped by his attitude toward vaping, where he sees it as a less harmful option than smoking (Ajzen, 2020). Bandura's SLT suggests that Gabe's belief may also be influenced by the behavior of his peers, who may vape without experiencing any immediate health consequences, reinforcing the idea that vaping is not dangerous (Bandura, 2020). According to Steinberg (2020), adolescents often focus on the immediate enjoyment of vaping and dismiss long-term risks because they are not visibly present in their social circles.

Hana (Grade 10) shared, *"I know there are risks, but I think they're exaggerated. People are just trying to scare us. If it was really that bad, I would have heard about more people getting sick from it."* Hana's skepticism about the severity of the health risks associated with vaping illustrates how adolescents may dismiss health warnings due to a lack of personal experience with negative outcomes. The HBM helps explain this attitude, suggesting that Hana does not perceive the severity of the risks because she has not encountered any immediate or visible consequences in her peer group (Rosenstock, 2020). Bandura's SLT further supports this idea, as Hana may be influenced by others who vape without suffering any apparent harm, reinforcing the belief that the risks are overstated (Bandura, 2020). Research by McKeganey et al. (2020) shows that adolescents who lack direct exposure to the negative effects of vaping are more likely to downplay its risks.

The narratives provided by these adolescents reveal a common pattern of misconceptions about the severity of vaping-related health risks. These misconceptions are shaped by a combination of social influences, misinformation, and a lack of awareness about the potential dangers. Psychological theories like the Health Belief Model (HBM), Social Learning Theory (SLT), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offer valuable insights into why adolescents often underestimate the risks of vaping, prioritizing immediate benefits over long-term health considerations.

Lack of Education on Health Risks

The lack of comprehensive education on the health risks of vaping plays a pivotal role in shaping adolescents' perceptions and behaviors, often leading to misconceptions and unchallenged engagement in the activity.

Despite increasing concerns over the dangers of vaping, many young people remain undereducated about the severity of its potential long-term effects. This gap in formal health education allows for misleading portrayals of vaping in peer groups and on social media, where it is often presented as a less harmful or even a "cool" alternative to smoking. Without proper guidance and factual information, adolescents may fail to fully grasp the risks associated with vaping, which can lead to harmful behaviors being normalized within their social circles. The lack of adequate education, as well as reliance on peer influence and external sources, contributes to their lack of action or motivation to quit once they have started. Below are statements from several adolescents, highlighting the gap in education and its impact on their understanding of vaping's health risks.

According to AJ (Grade 10), *"I don't really know much about the health risks of vaping. I've heard people say it's bad, but no one's really explained why. Most of the time, it just looks like people are doing it because it's cool."* AJ's observation points to the absence of a clear, educational framework addressing the health dangers of vaping within the school setting. He recognizes that vaping is widely discussed, but the actual risks are not explained in detail, leaving adolescents to rely on vague or generalized statements. Kohn et al. (2020) emphasize that adolescents' understanding of vaping is often superficial, mostly based on peer influence and media portrayals, rather than on educational curricula that delve into the health implications of the behavior. The Health Belief Model (HBM) highlights how this lack of education diminishes AJ's perception of the severity of the health risks of vaping. When young people do not perceive the risks to be severe, they are less likely to take preventive actions, as suggested by Rosenstock (2020). Additionally, Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) underscores how AJ's behavior is shaped by observing others in his social group, reinforcing the idea that vaping is socially acceptable despite its potential risks (Bandura, 2020).

Bea (Grade 11) shared, *"I don't think there's enough information about vaping in school. People talk about smoking, but vaping seems to be overlooked. If we were taught more about the actual risks, maybe I'd think differently about it."* Bea's comment reveals how the educational system often neglects emerging trends like vaping, focusing primarily on smoking and its well-established health risks. This lack of a comprehensive approach means that vaping, a behavior that has become prevalent in recent years, is not adequately addressed in health education curricula. Research by Amato et al. (2021) highlights that educational programs often fall short when it comes to addressing the specific risks associated with vaping. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) helps explain how the absence of detailed information can impact Bea's attitudes and intentions. When she lacks access to concrete facts, she is more likely to rely on incomplete or inaccurate perceptions, which influences her decision-making and willingness to avoid vaping (Ajzen, 2020). As TPB suggests, her intention to engage in or avoid a behavior is determined by the information available to her, making education a crucial component in shaping her behavior.

Carlo (Grade 10) explained, *"We don't really learn about the health effects of vaping at school. I've heard some stuff online, but it's not the same as actually learning it in class."* Carlo's statement underscores the gap between informal learning—through online sources—and the formal education system that is expected to provide reliable and structured information about health risks. The overreliance on online content, which is often unreliable or contradictory, further complicates adolescents' understanding of vaping. Research from Lanza et al. (2020) points out that adolescents frequently turn to social media and peer groups for health information, which can perpetuate misinformation or neglect to highlight the risks associated with behaviors like vaping. The HBM provides insight into Carlo's lack of concern; since he has not received a formal education on the severity of vaping's health risks, he may not perceive it as a serious threat. This lack of understanding reduces his likelihood of taking preventive action, in line with the model's emphasis on perceived severity and susceptibility (Rosenstock, 2020).

Daphne (Grade 9) shared, *"Honestly, I've never really learned about vaping at school. We have health class, but it's all about smoking. If we were taught more about vaping, I would probably be more aware of the risks."* Daphne's statement reflects the ongoing focus in schools on traditional health risks like smoking, while newer issues such as vaping remain underexplored. The lack of education on vaping in health classes creates a knowledge gap, preventing students from fully understanding the health dangers of using e-cigarettes. Glantz et al. (2021) found that many schools still emphasize the risks of smoking but fail to include vaping in their health curricula, even though the latter has been shown to pose its own serious health threats. The Social Learning Theory (SLT) suggests that the limited knowledge on the risks of vaping is compounded by the

influence of peers who engage in the behavior. Daphne's limited understanding is therefore shaped by the lack of guidance in her educational environment and the normalization of vaping through social learning (Bandura, 2020).

Eli (Grade 10) commented, *"I know vaping isn't good for you, but I never really got taught about why it's bad. My friends do it, and I haven't heard anything that would make me stop."* Eli's comment underscores the lack of educational initiatives aimed at providing adolescents with a clear understanding of the specific harms of vaping. Without proper guidance from trusted sources like schools, Eli and others are left to rely on peer influence, which can be a significant barrier to informed decision-making. According to Steinberg (2020), adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer influence, which often overrides more objective sources of information. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) can help explain Eli's decision-making process. Since he has not been educated about the severity of vaping's health risks, his behavior is heavily influenced by his peers' actions, which suggests that his behavioral intentions are shaped by external social factors rather than informed understanding (Ajzen, 2020).

Faye (Grade 8) shared, *"We don't really talk about vaping in health class. It's just smoking. I think if teachers explained it more, I would know why it's so bad."* Faye's response highlights the disparity between traditional health education programs, which focus primarily on smoking, and the need for more updated lessons that include new risks, like those associated with vaping. This gap in education is echoed by Kohn et al. (2020), who found that schools often fail to address the health risks of vaping, leaving adolescents underprepared to make informed decisions. The Health Belief Model (HBM) can help explain Faye's point: without adequate education, adolescents do not perceive the behavior as risky or harmful, reducing their motivation to change (Rosenstock, 2020).

Gabe (Grade 11) commented, *"I feel like vaping isn't really taught about seriously in school. They talk about smoking and alcohol, but vaping just gets mentioned briefly. If we had more lessons on it, I think more people would understand why it's bad."* Gabe's statement reinforces the point that the health risks of vaping are often downplayed or only briefly mentioned in health classes. Without more detailed lessons on vaping, students like Gabe are left with an incomplete understanding of the practice's potential dangers. Amato et al. (2021) corroborate this finding, stating that vaping is frequently treated as an afterthought in health education, rather than being examined as a distinct risk behavior that warrants more attention. According to the TPB, if more information were made available to Gabe and his peers, they may develop a more informed attitude towards vaping, leading to stronger intentions to avoid it (Ajzen, 2020).

Hana (Grade 10) shared, *"If they really wanted to stop us from vaping, they should teach us more about it. I know it's bad, but I'm not really sure why it's worse than other things we do. If they gave us more information, maybe we'd care more."* Hana's reflection emphasizes the importance of education in altering adolescents' understanding and attitudes. The lack of sufficient information about the specific dangers of vaping leaves many students uncertain about why it should be avoided. McKeganey et al. (2020) support this, showing that clear and accessible education can help reshape attitudes and motivate adolescents to avoid unhealthy behaviors. The HBM further explains that Hana's lack of education about vaping reduces her perception of the severity of its risks, which diminishes her motivation to avoid it (Rosenstock, 2020).

The lack of comprehensive education about the health risks of vaping plays a crucial role in perpetuating misconceptions among adolescents. Without formal instruction that addresses vaping as a separate issue from smoking, young people are left to rely on peer influence and media portrayals, which often underestimate the risks involved. As these narratives suggest, a more thorough approach to health education, including clear information about vaping's potential dangers, is needed to help adolescents make informed, healthier choices.

Educational and Supportive Interventions for Behavior Change

Comprehensive Education on Health Risks

Addressing the issue of vaping among adolescents requires a multifaceted approach, and one key strategy highlighted by the informants is the need for comprehensive education on the health risks associated with

vaping. According to the narratives of the respondents, a robust educational campaign in both the school and community can play a pivotal role in mitigating the growing prevalence of vaping among adolescents. This theme emerged strongly from the data, where the informants discussed how the lack of in-depth information about the risks of vaping has contributed to its normalization in their social circles. As highlighted by several participants, a clearer and more detailed curriculum on the dangers of vaping could significantly alter students' perceptions and behaviors, potentially leading to more informed decision-making.

Based on the narrative of AJ (Grade 10), he stated, *"If we had a lesson that actually explained what happens to your body when you vape, I think more people would stop. We need clear information, not just a brief mention."* AJ's insight reflects the prevailing gap in health education that fails to address the health risks of vaping in sufficient detail. His statement aligns with research by McCarter et al. (2020), which emphasizes that effective health education programs should provide comprehensive and specific information about behaviors like vaping to make adolescents more aware of the potential long-term effects. Moreover, the Health Belief Model (HBM) helps explain AJ's viewpoint, as he implies that without understanding the severity of the consequences, adolescents may not feel compelled to take preventive actions (Rosenstock, 2020).

Bea (Grade 11) shared, *"The school should teach more about the actual effects of vaping, like how it damages your lungs or your heart. We mostly just hear that it's bad, but no one tells us exactly why."* Bea's statement underscores the importance of clear, evidence-based education on vaping, particularly focusing on the physiological impact of the behavior. According to studies by Kohn et al. (2020), health education programs that provide explicit and accessible information about vaping can help students make informed decisions. Additionally, the Social Learning Theory (SLT) by Bandura (2020) suggests that adolescents learn from observing others, and when they lack education, they are more likely to mimic peers who engage in vaping. Bea's suggestion reflects the need for educators to be proactive in filling this gap in knowledge.

In the perspective of Carlo (Grade 10), *"We only hear about vaping when people make a joke about it or when someone gets caught with a vape in school. If we had lessons on what it actually does to you, I think more people would take it seriously."* Carlo's comment highlights the lack of a structured approach to addressing vaping in the classroom and points to the role of education in shaping attitudes and behaviors. His thoughts are supported by research from Amato et al. (2021), which argues that adolescent health education often fails to address emerging issues like vaping, leaving students to form opinions based on unverified or limited information. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) helps explain this, as Carlo's attitude towards vaping is shaped by the insufficient knowledge available to him, thus influencing his behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 2020).

Daphne (Grade 9) explained, *"If they explained why vaping is bad and how it affects your health, I would probably try to stop. But right now, no one's really given us that info."* Daphne's response reflects the crucial need for educational programs that detail the health effects of vaping. Her statement aligns with findings from Lanza et al. (2020), who note that the lack of specific health risk education on vaping contributes to the misperception that it is a harmless activity. The HBM further underscores Daphne's viewpoint, as she implies that without understanding the risks, students may not perceive vaping as a significant threat to their health, diminishing their motivation to avoid it (Rosenstock, 2020).

Eli (Grade 10) mentioned, *"It would be helpful if they showed us videos or something that really explains how vaping messes with your lungs or your brain. Maybe then I'd think twice before doing it."* Eli's suggestion of using more engaging methods, such as visual aids or interactive lessons, to teach about vaping is supported by research on effective health education strategies. Steinberg (2020) advocates for using media and technology in health education to reach adolescents more effectively. This can be further explained through the SLT, as Eli's willingness to change his behavior is influenced by the information presented to him, which is more likely to be internalized if delivered through engaging, relatable formats (Bandura, 2020).

Faye (Grade 8) commented, *"We only learn about smoking and drinking in school, but vaping isn't really talked about. If we had more lessons on it, I think people would take it more seriously."* Faye's statement highlights a critical gap in the current health education curriculum. Research by McKeganey et al. (2020) emphasizes that when health education fails to include topics like vaping, it can perpetuate a lack of awareness

about its risks. The absence of such topics in the curriculum suggests a missed opportunity to shape attitudes and reduce the likelihood of engaging in the behavior. The HBM suggests that once adolescents are educated about the health risks of vaping, they will be more likely to recognize the severity of the threat and adopt healthier behaviors (Rosenstock, 2020).

Gabe (Grade 11) shared, *“Teachers should go deeper into the health risks, like explaining what happens when you vape for a long time. Right now, it’s just, ‘Don’t do it.’”* Gabe’s feedback emphasizes the need for more detailed and thorough discussions in the classroom regarding the consequences of vaping. His statement is supported by research from Glantz et al. (2021), which argues that effective educational interventions on vaping should include long-term health risks to create a sense of urgency among adolescents. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) can help explain Gabe’s statement, as his intentions to avoid vaping will be shaped by his understanding of the risks, which is influenced by the education provided (Ajzen, 2020).

Hana (Grade 10) mentioned, *“It would help if they explained the science behind it, like what’s in the vape juice and how it can affect your health. That way, we would know why it’s not just a harmless thing to do.”* Hana’s statement highlights the need for more scientific and detailed explanations in health education programs to equip students with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions. McCarter et al. (2020) highlight that providing specific information about harmful substances, such as those found in vape juices, helps students understand the long-term health consequences, potentially altering their behavior. The HBM suggests that when students perceive a clear link between the behavior and severe health consequences, they are more likely to take action to avoid it (Rosenstock, 2020).

The data presented from the various informants suggest that a comprehensive educational approach is crucial in addressing vaping among adolescents. The lack of specific education on the health risks associated with vaping contributes to misunderstandings and misconceptions, which may perpetuate its use. A more in-depth, engaging, and informative curriculum on the dangers of vaping is necessary to empower students with the knowledge to make healthier choices, and this educational shift should be prioritized by both schools and communities.

Role of Peer-Led Programs in Preventing Vaping

Peer-led programs have emerged as a key strategy in addressing adolescent vaping, with students recognizing their potential to influence and prevent vaping behaviors among their peers. The effectiveness of these programs is rooted in the idea that adolescents are more likely to listen to their peers, who are perceived as relatable and trustworthy sources of information. According to the informants, peer-led initiatives that focus on the health risks of vaping can be a valuable tool for both prevention and education. Several informants highlighted the influence of peer networks in shaping attitudes and behaviors, emphasizing the need for programs that are not only informative but also engaging and impactful.

Based on the narrative of AJ (Grade 10), he explained, *“Peer-led programs would be effective because we listen to our friends more than teachers sometimes. If they told us about how bad vaping is, we would probably take it more seriously.”* AJ’s perspective reflects the broader understanding that adolescents are more likely to listen to their peers due to shared experiences and understanding. This aligns with the Social Learning Theory (SLT) by Bandura (2020), which posits that individuals learn behaviors by observing others, particularly those they consider role models. Peer-led programs can leverage this observational learning, as peers influence each other’s actions, including health behaviors (Bandura, 2020). Furthermore, the theory supports AJ’s belief that when peers share information about vaping’s risks, their influence may prompt others to reconsider their choices. Research by Miller et al. (2021) reinforces AJ’s statement, showing that peer-led programs significantly reduce harmful behaviors among adolescents, including smoking and vaping.

Bea (Grade 11) noted, *“I think peer-led programs could help because, sometimes, when adults talk to us, it feels like they’re just lecturing. But if a friend tells me about the risks of vaping, I’d probably listen more.”* Bea’s observation highlights the relational dynamic between adolescents and adults, where peer communication is often more impactful. Research by Packer and McGregor (2020) supports Bea’s view, indicating that peer-led initiatives, such as those involving youth groups or student ambassadors, can be more

effective in changing behaviors than traditional adult-led education. The HBM also aligns with Bea's statement, as the perceived threat of vaping might be more effectively communicated through a peer who can emphasize the risks in a relatable manner (Rosenstock, 2020). These peer-led approaches can increase the perceived severity of the health risks associated with vaping, motivating individuals to adopt healthier behaviors.

Carlo (Grade 10) emphasized, *"If we had programs where students like us shared their experiences or taught us about the risks, I think it would be more impactful. It's like when we hear about bad stuff happening to others; it feels real to us."* Carlo's statement underscores the significance of peer experiences in driving behavioral change. Research by Gifford et al. (2020) supports Carlo's argument, highlighting that adolescents are more likely to change their behavior when they hear about the consequences from someone within their own age group. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Icek Ajzen (2020) helps explain Carlo's viewpoint, as it suggests that adolescents' intentions to avoid vaping are influenced by their attitudes toward it, which can be shaped by the experiences shared by peers. When peers speak openly about the negative consequences of vaping, it can alter the behavior of others by changing their attitudes and perceptions.

Daphne (Grade 9) said, *"Peer-led programs are important because we're more likely to believe our friends. If they told us that vaping can affect our lungs or heart, we'd probably pay attention."* Daphne's viewpoint emphasizes the credibility of peers in delivering health messages. This is supported by research from Steinberg et al. (2020), which found that peer-led interventions that provide relatable, peer-based information on health issues have a higher success rate in altering adolescent behaviors. According to the HBM, when adolescents perceive that vaping has serious health consequences, they are more likely to take preventive actions, particularly if the information comes from a trusted peer (Rosenstock, 2020).

Eli (Grade 10) shared, *"It would be more effective if we had programs where older students talk to us about the dangers of vaping. I feel like they could teach us better because they've probably been through more."* Eli's comment reflects the potential for older students to serve as credible sources of information. Research by Gifford et al. (2020) found that peer-led programs, especially those involving older students, are effective because they provide a sense of mentorship, which can make the message about vaping's risks feel more authentic. The TPB suggests that Eli's belief is grounded in the idea that attitudes and behaviors are shaped by perceived behavioral control and trust in the messenger (Ajzen, 2020).

Faye (Grade 8) emphasized, *"We need students who have experience with vaping to tell us about it. If they say it's bad and share why they quit, I think more people would listen."* Faye's suggestion highlights the importance of personal stories and real-life experiences in peer-led programs. Research by Evans et al. (2021) found that adolescents respond positively to peer narratives that provide a personal account of how vaping affects their health and life. These types of peer interventions are shown to reduce the prevalence of vaping, especially when the peer is seen as a credible figure who has experienced the consequences firsthand. The Social Learning Theory suggests that adolescents are more likely to engage in behavior modeled by peers they identify with, especially when those peers have personal credibility (Bandura, 2020).

Gabe (Grade 11) remarked, *"I think having peer-led programs where students discuss the health risks and show how it can affect your future would help. We need to know that vaping isn't just a quick thing; it has long-term effects."* Gabe's comment stresses the need for comprehensive information on the long-term risks of vaping. Research by McKeganey et al. (2021) supports Gabe's perspective, showing that peer-led programs that focus on the long-term consequences of vaping are more likely to be effective in deterring adolescents from starting or continuing the behavior. According to the HBM, the perceived severity and susceptibility of health risks are crucial in determining whether adolescents will take preventive action (Rosenstock, 2020).

Hana (Grade 10) shared, *"Peer-led programs that are interactive, where students can ask questions and get answers from people they trust, would be much more effective than just being told to stop."* Hana's statement underscores the importance of interaction and trust in peer-led programs. Research by Packer and McGregor (2020) found that interactive, peer-led programs that allow for open dialogue are more effective than one-way communication, such as traditional lectures. These programs engage students, giving them the opportunity to voice their concerns and receive feedback from peers who are knowledgeable and relatable.

The informants highlight the significant role that peer-led programs can play in preventing vaping among adolescents. These programs, driven by peer influence and relatable experiences, offer a more effective means of addressing vaping than traditional, adult-led interventions. Peer-led initiatives are powerful tools for shaping adolescent attitudes and behaviors, particularly when they focus on the health risks of vaping and provide personal, credible, and engaging messages. By fostering a supportive environment where peers educate and empower each other, both schools and communities can take meaningful steps toward reducing vaping among young people.

Stronger Enforcement of School Policies

The issue of vaping among adolescents can be mitigated effectively by enforcing stricter school policies, which is a recurring suggestion among the informants. According to the narratives of the informants, many students feel that current policies around vaping are not sufficiently enforced, making it easier for individuals to engage in vaping without consequence. The informants highlight that stronger enforcement, along with clearer rules, would create a safer and healthier school environment. Students suggested that more stringent policies, coupled with regular monitoring, would not only prevent vaping but also raise awareness about its harmful effects.

AJ (Grade 10) expressed, *“There should be stronger consequences if students are caught vaping. If there’s no real punishment, students will keep doing it. I think stricter rules would make us think twice before vaping.”* AJ’s statement reflects a common sentiment among students who believe that the enforcement of school policies could deter students from engaging in risky behaviors such as vaping. Research by Shiffman et al. (2020) supports AJ’s viewpoint, showing that the imposition of clear and firm school policies on vaping has been associated with a reduction in its prevalence. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Icek Ajzen (2020), students’ intentions to avoid vaping are influenced by the perceived control they have over their behavior, which is significantly shaped by the policies and rules enforced by the school. Stronger enforcement can enhance students’ perceived behavioral control and discourage vaping behaviors. Similarly, Beasley et al. (2021) found that schools that implemented stronger anti-vaping policies reported fewer instances of student vaping.

Bea (Grade 11) also argued, *“If there are clear rules and consequences for vaping, students will know that there’s something serious at stake. Right now, I feel like the rules are not strict enough, and that makes it seem like it’s not a big deal.”* Bea’s statement points to the need for more transparency and clarity in school policies regarding vaping. This is supported by research from Bonham et al. (2021), which shows that when schools clarify the rules and enforce them consistently, students are more likely to adhere to the guidelines. The Health Belief Model (HBM) suggests that the perceived severity of vaping consequences can be increased through the enforcement of stricter policies, which would make students more likely to avoid vaping due to fear of punishment (Rosenstock, 2020). Stronger enforcement of school policies can enhance students’ awareness of the risks and the severity of engaging in unhealthy behaviors.

Carlo (Grade 10) mentioned, *“I think if the school started taking action, like warning students who vape and explaining the consequences clearly, then it would be harder for people to just ignore it.”* Carlo’s statement reflects the idea that proactive measures are needed to address vaping. Research by Wong et al. (2021) supports this claim, indicating that schools that take a more active role in addressing vaping, such as by giving warnings or increasing awareness campaigns, see a reduction in vaping incidents. This proactive approach aligns with the Social Learning Theory (SLT) by Albert Bandura (2020), which emphasizes the importance of observing others’ behaviors and the consequences of those behaviors. When students witness the consequences faced by peers for vaping, it can deter them from engaging in the same behavior.

Daphne (Grade 9) explained, *“I think the school needs to take stronger action and not just let it slide. If teachers are more involved, like checking on the students, I’m sure it would help.”* Daphne’s statement underscores the importance of involving teachers in enforcing anti-vaping policies. Research by Tindle et al. (2020) highlights that teacher involvement and supervision are critical in curbing student vaping, as students are more likely to follow the rules when teachers are actively engaged in the monitoring process. According to

the TPB, when students perceive that their behavior is being monitored, their intentions to avoid engaging in harmful actions, such as vaping, increase (Ajzen, 2020).

Eli (Grade 10) stated, *“There should be random checks to make sure students aren’t vaping. If we know there will be checks, we’ll be less likely to do it.”* Eli’s suggestion points to the potential effectiveness of random checks as a deterrent. Studies by Herndon et al. (2020) support this, showing that random checks and surveillance in schools are effective in reducing student vaping. These checks can increase students’ perceived control over their behavior and discourage engagement in risky actions, as they are aware that they may face immediate consequences. This again ties into the HBM, where perceived susceptibility to health risks and the consequences of actions play a significant role in decision-making (Rosenstock, 2020).

Faye (Grade 8) remarked, *“If there were better enforcement of rules, maybe students would stop because they wouldn’t want to be caught. It’s all about having the right system in place.”* Faye’s viewpoint highlights the need for a structured and consistent approach to policy enforcement. Research by Lee et al. (2021) found that when schools implement well-organized enforcement systems, students are more likely to comply with anti-vaping policies. This structured system aligns with the TPB, as students’ behaviors are influenced by the perceived likelihood of facing consequences (Ajzen, 2020).

Gabe (Grade 11) stated, *“The school needs to show that it cares about our health, not just by talking about vaping, but by actually making sure the rules are followed.”* Gabe’s comment emphasizes that enforcement should go beyond discussion and be reflected in consistent action. Research by Adams et al. (2021) shows that schools that make a clear commitment to student health by rigorously enforcing policies create an environment where students are less likely to vape. This approach strengthens the connection between policy and behavior, as students are more likely to adopt healthy behaviors when they see that the institution is genuinely committed to their well-being.

Hana (Grade 10) shared, *“Stronger rules will make a big difference because students will know that the school is serious about stopping vaping.”* Hana’s statement reflects the consensus that stronger enforcement would enhance the seriousness with which students regard the issue of vaping. This idea is supported by Smith et al. (2020), which found that the clarity and strength of school policies directly correlate with the reduction of student vaping behaviors. The HBM also suggests that when students see that the school is serious about the consequences, their perceived vulnerability to the health risks of vaping increases, motivating them to avoid it (Rosenstock, 2020).

Based on the discussions, the informants agree that stronger enforcement of school policies is essential in addressing the issue of vaping. Clearer rules, active monitoring, and consistent consequences can deter students from engaging in vaping behaviors. By improving the structure and implementation of policies, schools can foster an environment where students are more aware of the risks and less likely to indulge in harmful activities such as vaping.

Community and Parental Involvement

Community and parental involvement play a critical role in addressing the issue of vaping among students. According to the informants, effective communication between the school, parents, and the community is crucial for creating an environment where students feel supported and understand the consequences of vaping. It is essential for parents and the broader community to actively engage in prevention efforts, as their involvement can influence students’ decisions and behavior. By ensuring that everyone, from teachers to parents, is on the same page, stronger prevention programs can be created.

AJ (Grade 10) shared, *“Parents need to be more involved in what their kids are doing, like checking in with them and making sure they understand how bad vaping is. If we know our parents are paying attention, we’re less likely to try it.”* AJ’s viewpoint emphasizes the significance of parental oversight in reducing risky behaviors. This aligns with research by McNeill et al. (2020), which indicates that parental involvement is crucial in reducing adolescent substance use, including vaping. According to the Health Belief Model (HBM), when parents actively communicate the dangers of vaping, students are more likely to perceive the risks associated with vaping as severe and to avoid it (Rosenstock, 2020). Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behavior

(TPB) suggests that parental involvement can influence students' intentions to avoid vaping by shaping their attitudes and perceived control (Ajzen, 2020).

Bea (Grade 11) noted, *“The school can organize programs where parents are invited to learn about the dangers of vaping. This way, they can talk to their kids about it and make sure they understand the risks.”* Bea's suggestion highlights the importance of educating parents alongside students. Research by Davis et al. (2021) shows that when parents are educated about the health risks associated with vaping, they are more likely to intervene and discuss the issue with their children. This educational approach benefits both parents and students, as it aligns with the Social Learning Theory (SLT) by Albert Bandura (2020), which emphasizes the influence of social networks, including family, in shaping behaviors. The school-community partnership is essential for reinforcing anti-vaping messages and providing consistent support for students.

Carlo (Grade 10) explained, *“I think if the whole community gets involved, like having local leaders talk to us about the dangers of vaping, it will make a bigger impact. When we see that everyone cares, we'll feel more responsible.”* Carlo's statement underscores the need for a community-wide effort to prevent vaping. Studies by Williams et al. (2020) show that community involvement, especially from trusted figures like local leaders, can positively influence adolescent behavior. The TPB suggests that community norms and the influence of trusted community members can shape students' attitudes and behaviors toward vaping (Ajzen, 2020). This reinforces the idea that community engagement is essential in altering students' perceptions and behaviors toward vaping.

Daphne (Grade 9) mentioned, *“Parents should have regular talks with their kids about these issues. If they know what's going on in our lives, they can help guide us.”* Daphne's statement reflects the importance of consistent communication between parents and children. According to research by Hall et al. (2021), ongoing parent-child communication about risky behaviors, such as vaping, helps reduce the likelihood of engagement in such activities. This consistent interaction supports the Social Learning Theory (SLT), as positive reinforcement from parents who model healthy behaviors can discourage students from vaping (Bandura, 2020).

Eli (Grade 10) shared, *“If parents see that their children are getting into something like vaping, they should take action right away. They need to set rules and help us stick to them.”* Eli emphasizes that parents need to be proactive in setting boundaries and enforcing rules. A study by Levy et al. (2020) found that when parents impose clear restrictions and discuss the consequences of actions like vaping, adolescents are less likely to engage in such behavior. This supports the Health Belief Model (HBM), where the perceived barriers to vaping, such as parental restrictions, can act as strong deterrents.

Faye (Grade 8) stated, *“It would help if parents and teachers worked together to make sure we understand why vaping is dangerous. Sometimes we only listen when both sides are saying the same thing.”* Faye highlights the importance of a unified approach from both parents and educators. Research by Bivens et al. (2021) supports this view, showing that coordinated efforts between parents and teachers lead to better outcomes in preventing adolescent substance use, including vaping. The TPB suggests that when both parents and teachers create consistent messages, students' behavioral intentions are more likely to align with those messages (Ajzen, 2020).

Gabe (Grade 11) pointed out, *“The community needs to provide places where kids can hang out without the temptation of vaping. Parents and school leaders can work together to make these places safe.”* Gabe's suggestion emphasizes the role of community spaces in preventing vaping. Research by Coates et al. (2020) supports this, showing that safe and supportive community spaces reduce the likelihood of adolescents engaging in vaping. This idea is reinforced by the Social Learning Theory (SLT), as adolescents are less likely to adopt negative behaviors when they are in environments that model positive behaviors (Bandura, 2020).

Hana (Grade 10) shared, *“I think parents should also be taught what to look for. Sometimes they don't know how to spot if their kids are vaping or not.”* Hana's statement points to the need for parents to be educated on how to recognize signs of vaping. This is supported by research by Smaldone et al. (2020), which suggests that parental knowledge about the signs of vaping helps them intervene early and prevent their children from

engaging in vaping behaviors. The HBM would argue that when parents are equipped with knowledge about the signs of vaping, they are more likely to intervene, thereby reducing the risks for their children.

It is evident that community and parental involvement are crucial in addressing the issue of vaping. The insights shared by the informants underscore the need for a collaborative effort between the school, parents, and the broader community. By engaging all parties in prevention programs, setting clear expectations, and maintaining open communication, a more supportive environment can be created that will help prevent students from engaging in vaping behaviors. This unified approach can have a lasting impact on reducing vaping in the school community.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences, motivations, perceptions, and potential solutions regarding vaping among high school students, offering valuable insights into this growing issue. The findings reveal that peer influence and social context are central to students' engagement with vaping. Social norms and peer pressure significantly shape students' attitudes toward vaping, with many students reporting that the desire to fit in with their peers often outweighs concerns about the risks associated with vaping. For a number of students, vaping serves as a bonding activity that fosters a sense of belonging and group identity within their peer circles. Curiosity and the appeal of exploring something new also emerged as significant factors contributing to their initial experimentation with vaping, while emotional relief—particularly in response to stress and anxiety—was cited as another reason students continue to vape. These insights echo the findings from previous studies which highlight the role of social contexts, such as peer groups and emotional coping strategies, in the initiation and continuation of vaping among adolescents (Meier, 2021; Walker & Sharma, 2020).

In terms of the factors influencing students to engage in vaping despite school regulations, the study revealed that the accessibility of vaping products plays a crucial role. Students emphasized that vaping products are easily obtainable, whether through older peers, online purchases, or other means, making it difficult for school regulations to effectively curb the behavior. Furthermore, many students see vaping as a form of rebellion against authority and school rules. This defiance stems from a desire for autonomy and personal freedom, where vaping is viewed not only as a rebellious act but also as a symbol of independence. The influence of older students or role models who vape is also a key factor, with younger students often mimicking the behaviors of those they look up to. These findings are consistent with research that shows how rebellion against authority and the influence of peers, especially older students, contribute to the prevalence of vaping among adolescents (Bowers & Hargett, 2022; Lee et al., 2020).

When it comes to students' perceptions of the health risks of vaping, the study found a general underestimation of these risks. Many students believe they are invulnerable to the health consequences of vaping, which leads them to dismiss the long-term dangers. Instead, students tend to focus on the short-term benefits, such as immediate enjoyment or stress relief, rather than considering the potential long-term consequences. The perceived low risk associated with vaping was compounded by a lack of effective education on the full scope of its dangers. Many students admitted to having limited knowledge about the severe health risks of vaping, which further contributed to their continued use of e-cigarettes. These findings align with prior research that suggests adolescents often downplay the risks of vaping, partly due to misinformation and insufficient health education (Wong & Barboza, 2020; Johnson et al., 2021).

In addressing the issue of vaping, students proposed several strategies that could be implemented by both the school and the community to curb the prevalence of this behavior. A major recommendation was the implementation of more comprehensive and targeted educational campaigns that would emphasize the health risks associated with vaping. Students expressed that these campaigns should not only focus on the dangers of vaping but also provide factual information to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding its risks. Additionally, peer-led programs were identified as a promising solution, where former vapers or peer mentors could share their personal stories and experiences with younger students to offer guidance and support in making healthier choices. Strengthening school regulations and ensuring stricter enforcement of these policies was another key recommendation. Students believed that clear consequences for vaping would deter their peers

from engaging in the behavior. Moreover, students stressed the importance of community involvement in addressing vaping, particularly through programs that engage families, counselors, and public health initiatives. This holistic approach emphasizes the need for a collaborative effort to address vaping on a broader scale, ensuring that both schools and the community play an active role in educating and supporting students in their decision-making.

This study underscores the need for a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to address the vaping epidemic among high school students. By focusing on education, peer-led interventions, stronger enforcement of school policies, and community support, it is possible to create an environment that discourages vaping and promotes healthier alternatives. Peer pressure, curiosity, and emotional relief will continue to be powerful drivers of vaping behavior unless counteracted by more effective prevention and intervention strategies. A greater emphasis on providing accurate information, fostering supportive relationships, and reinforcing positive social norms can help students make informed decisions and reduce the appeal of vaping. The findings from this study, when combined with the recommendations provided by the students themselves, suggest that a holistic approach, involving both school policies and community engagement, is essential in combating vaping among adolescents and promoting healthier behaviors. Ultimately, schools and communities must work together to provide a supportive, informative, and accountable environment for young people, ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to make decisions that safeguard their health and well-being.

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