

Helping tool or gadget? Using e-cigarettes while trying to quit smoking: perspectives from the TABATRAJ study

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Using a social science perspective to analyze smoking cessation as a nonlinear process contributes to improve knowledge on ENDS' social acceptability. It allows to stress the variety of representations around it regarding age, gender, socio-economic background and initial tobacco use.

A data collection on e-cigarettes through a survey on tobacco use

■ In 2021, the French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT) obtained a funding through the French National Fund for Combatting Addiction to conduct a qualitative survey aiming to better understand smoking cessation.

■ TABATRAJ (2022-2024) is an ongoing sociological study exploring tobacco use and cessation through the lens of social health inequalities. It aims to better identify the diversity of patterns around withdrawal practices. In doing so, its first findings reveal results on ENDS use and its associated representations.

A sociological approach: interactionism applied to smoking cessation analysis

Theoretical framework

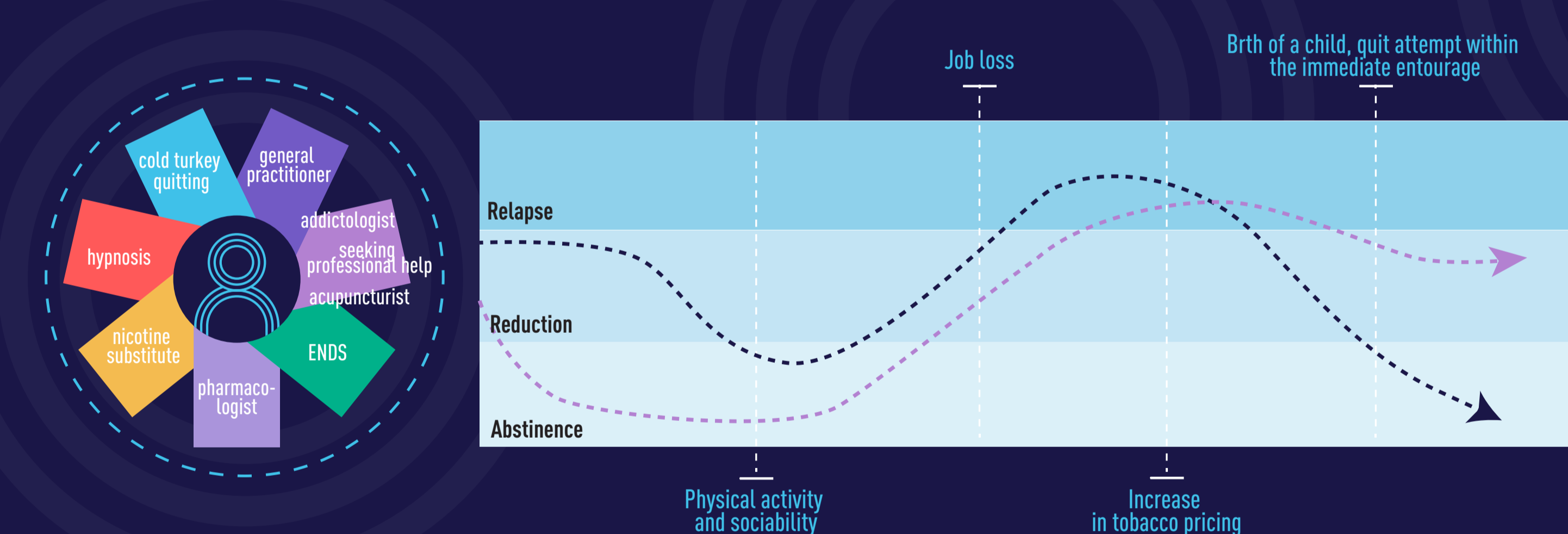
■ The sociological approach emerges as a complementary perspective to epidemiology or social psychology regarding the cessation process.
■ The concept of "career" (Becker, 1963) implies a comprehensive and sequential analysis. It allows to overcome a common opposition between reasonable use and abstinence (Pedersen, 2019). Smoking cessation is envisioned as a possibly nonlinear trajectory regarding people life paths.

Enrollment and data collection

■ In-depth semi-structured interviews (n≈100): 50 to 70 smokers or former smokers will be questioned, some of them twice with a 6 months' time interval.
■ Selection criteria: Adults (>18 yo) living in mainland France who decided to reduce or quit smoking within 24 months preceding the survey.
■ Profile diversification: age, gender, level of qualification, employment status, residence area, social environment, duration of tobacco use and chosen smoking cessation strategy. Special attention is given to "poor smokers" (Perreti-Watel, 2012), students and former hardcore smokers.

■ The interview guide addresses interviewees' relation to health and prevention policies, past and/or current smoking habits (with due attention on the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns) and reduction and/or cessation attempts.

■ Since April 2022, 28 interviews were conducted (≈1 to 2.5 hours). Several respondents (n=15) had tried ENDS during their withdrawal attempts or were users.



Preliminary results

■ All ENDS users perceived themselves as "non-smoker" or "former smoker".
■ ENDS are known and perceived as valid smoking cessation products, even when interviewees were not interested by it. They voiced less reluctance to try it out when introduced to it by relatives or caregivers. In most cases, it was used in addition to other smoking cessation tools.
■ Most users initially wanted to try it as a substitute for cigarettes but their patterns of use were various and evolutive. Their routines often differ from tobacco use (frequency, spaces).
■ Young users (< 30 yo) were more likely to self-establish their nicotine dosage while others let themselves be guided by external advice (salesman, tobaccologist). They were also better informed on e-liquids and devices. Yet, an overall passing knowledge of nicotine level consumed over time is to be noted.

"She [pulmonologist] was really in favor of e-cigarette even with liquid nicotine. Not every doctor is. She told me that if I needed to vape liquid nicotine on top of my nicotine patches during withdrawal it was totally fine" [Géraldine, 61 yo]

"Vape is something I tried a long time ago, I tried it several times. I bought one, I had many but it wasn't really enough to make me stop. It works now that I have quit smoking to hold onto the gesture. I don't bring it to work tho', it's just at home." [Stéphanie, 41 yo]

Conclusion

■ ENDS are well identified as available options amongst others to quit smoking by our respondents.
■ The willingness to include it in their cessation strategy seems to be linked to their initial relation with tobacco, age and familiarity with the product.
■ The perception of maintaining dependency on a product and/or habits associated with smoking (with minor concern regarding nicotine levels) remains a noticeable concern.

Bibliography

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