



E-cigarette prevalence, motivations for use, and relationship with tobacco – the changing situation in Ireland

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Context

Adolescent e-cigarette use is increasing worldwide amid concerns about: identified and as yet unknown harms; nicotine addiction; being a “gateway” drug; and renormalisation of smoking.

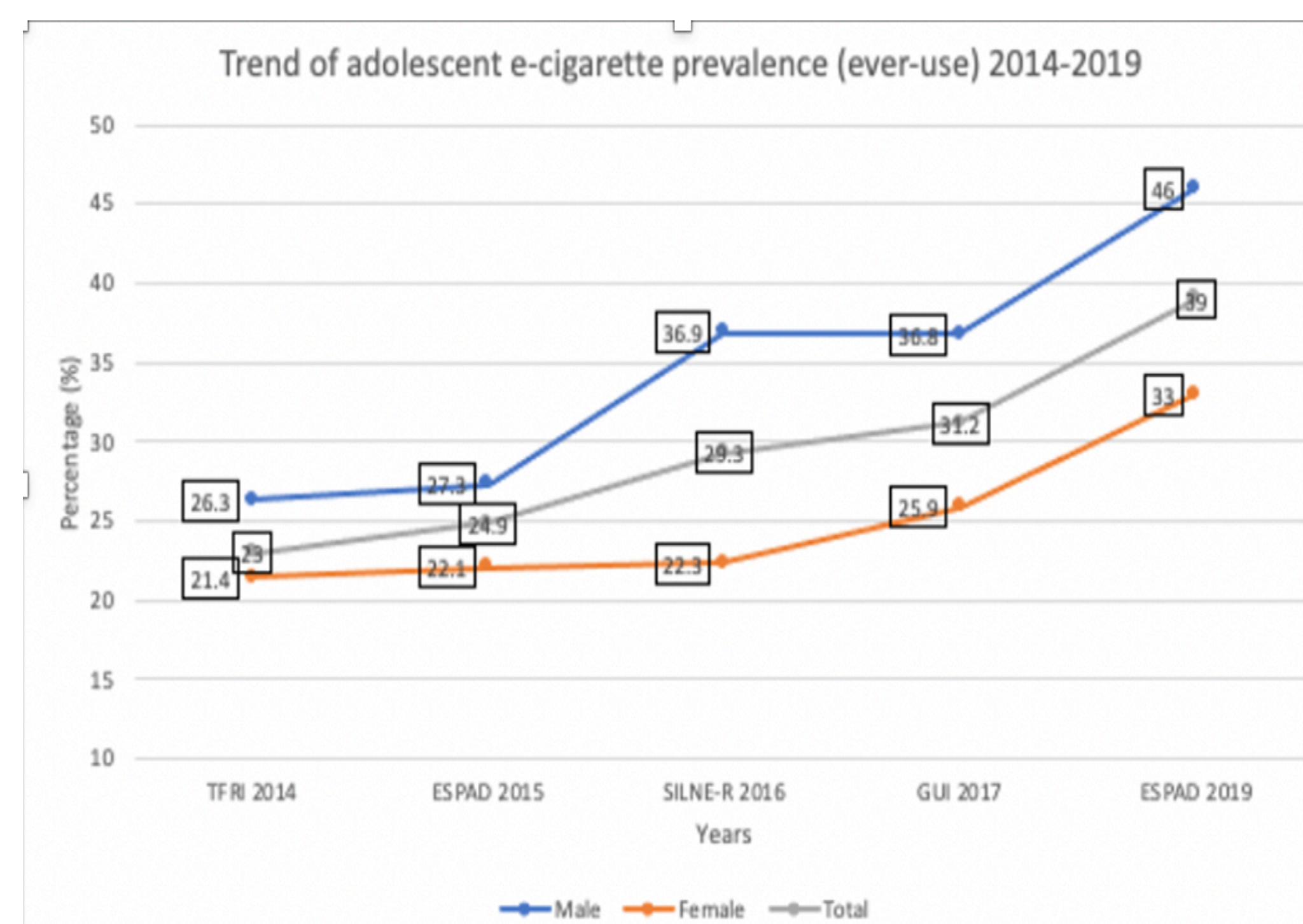
This study aimed to establish, from available data, the changing prevalence of Irish adolescents’ e-cigarette use, reasons for use, and relationship with tobacco at first use.

Methods

We identified five Irish health datasets with questions on adolescent e-cigarette use. Of these, TFRI was PI for four studies, namely ECIGS-TFRI (2014), SILNE-R (2016) and ESPAD (European Schools Project on Alcohol and Drugs) 2015 and 2019. We also drew on data from GUI (Growing Up in Ireland), Ireland’s national longitudinal study. All datasets comprised stratified random samples in school-based settings: ECIGS-TFRI 2014 (N=817), ESPAD-TFRI 2015 (N=1508), SILNE-R-TFRI 2016 (N=2051), GUI 2017 (N=6216), ESPAD-TFRI 2019 (N=3556). We report on 16 and 17 year olds. Secondary analysis was carried out, using descriptive statistical techniques to estimate changes in prevalence, reasons for trying e-cigarettes, and relationship with tobacco at first use.

Findings: Gender Changes in Prevalence 2014-2019

- Prevalence of ever-use increased from 23% in 2014 to 39% in 2019.
- The increase was rapid, particularly since 2016.
- By 2019, more adolescents tried e-cigarettes (39%) than smoking (32%).
- Boys were more likely to use cigarettes in each of the datasets rising from 26% in 2014 to 46% in 2019.



RESULTS
Changes in e-cigarette use among Irish 16-17 year olds between 2014 and 2019

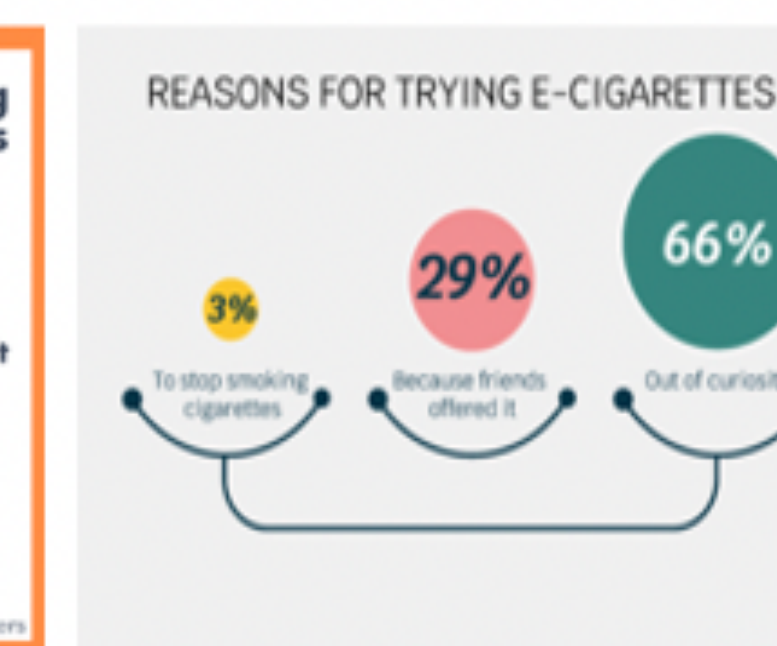
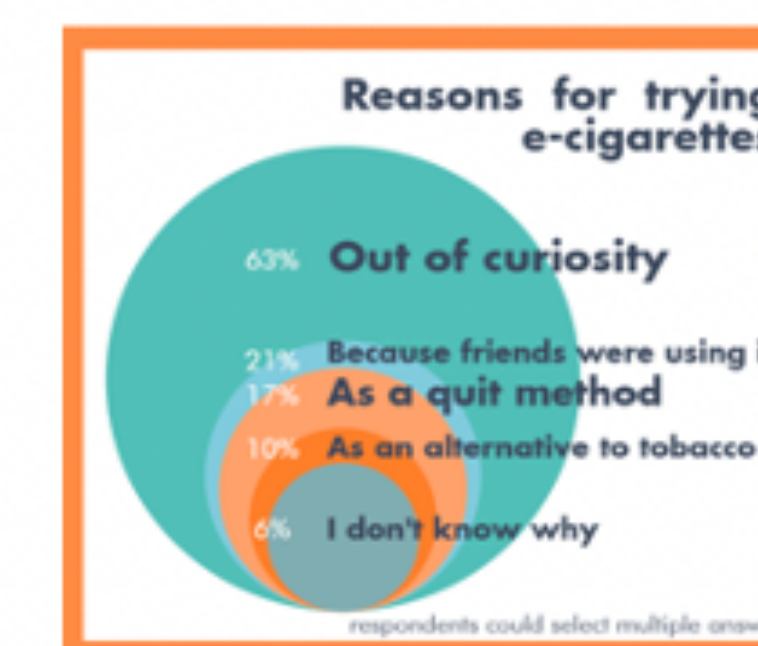
Prevalence of ever-use increased from 23% in 2014 to 39% in 2019, representing a rapid increase, particularly since 2016.

Findings: Reasons for trying e-cigarettes

Reasons for trying e-cigarettes

2015 ESPAD

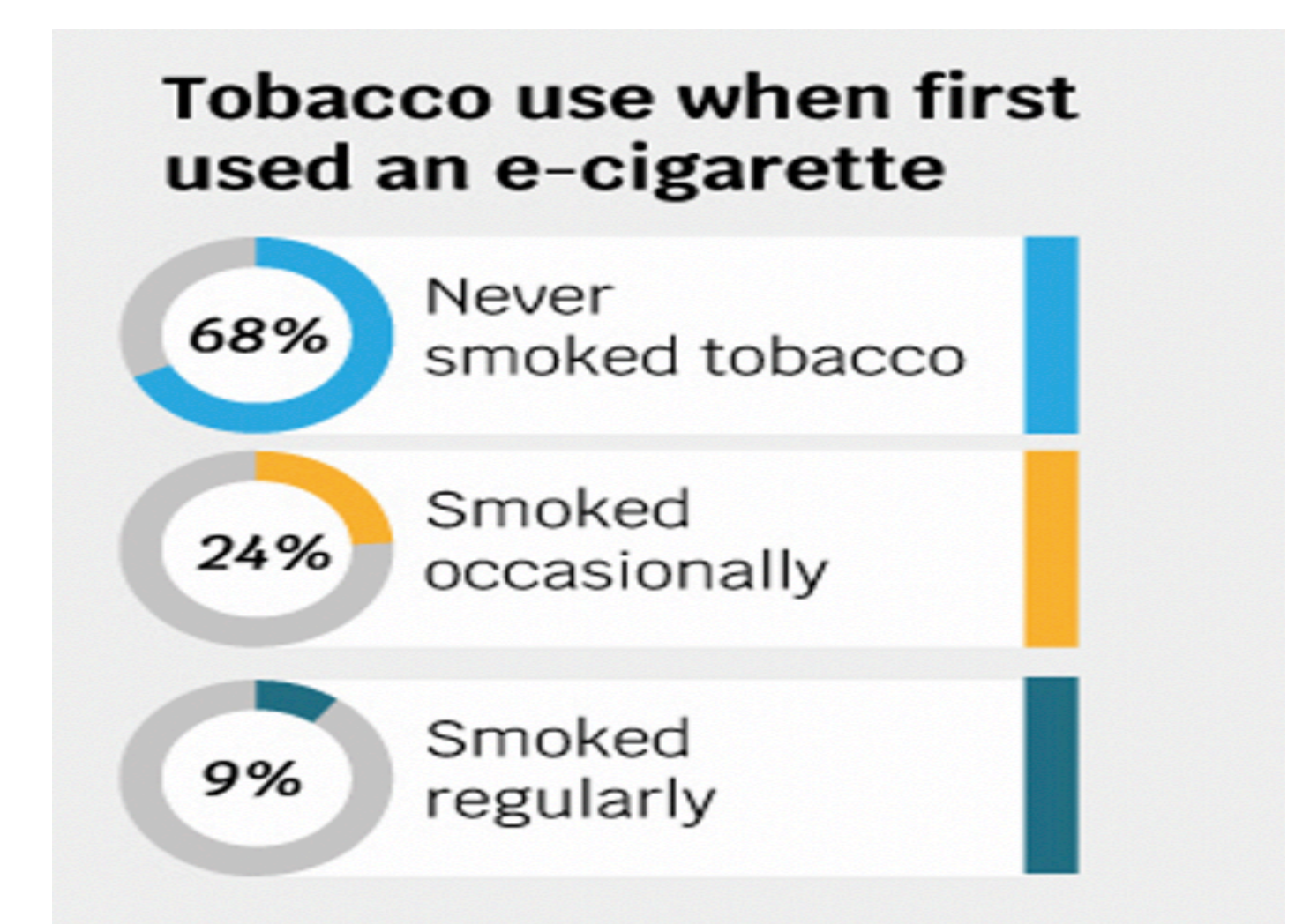
2019 ESPAD



By 2019, curiosity (66%) and friends (29%) were the two main reasons adolescents said they first used e-cigarettes, with only 3% saying it was to quit smoking.

Findings: E-cigarette use among smokers & never smokers

Those saying they had never used tobacco when they first tried e-cigarettes increased from 32% in 2015 to 68% in 2019.



Conclusions

E-cigarette use has risen rapidly among adolescents in Ireland since 2014. Boys are more at risk of using e-cigarettes.

The majority of adolescents who use e-cigarettes were not smokers when they started using e-cigarettes, pointing to a worrying new route into nicotine addiction.

E-cigarettes are not used by adolescents for smoking cessation.

In addition to new regulation and legislation for e-cigarettes, current tobacco control regulations for young people should be extended to include e-cigarettes.

References

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