

Abstract

Background: In May 2016 a ban on cigarette flavorings was introduced among member states of the EU in order to reduce appeal of smoking especially among youth and young adults. Since May 2020, the restriction has been extended to menthol flavored cigarettes. Until then, menthol was one of the most used tobacco flavors.

Aims: The main objective of this work is to map and describe patterns of use of tobacco and nicotine products among university students after the ban implementation. The secondary aim is to describe how the product is perceived as well as the attitudes towards the flavoring regulation.

Methods: The data was collected through on-line questionnaire survey in the Survio.com platform. The survey was distributed via social media channels including Facebook, Instagram and Discord. The study sample consists of 577 respondents, 307 of which had an experience using menthol cigarettes in their lifetime. The obtained data was imported into MS Excel where it was processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics tools.

Results: The results of the study imply that the average consumption of tobacco products is not affected by the ban among 56 % respondents. 12,4 % respondents reported a decline in tobacco usage and 15,0 % reported cessation. As a reaction to the ban implementation nearly one third (31,3 %) of menthol smokers started using non-menthol cigarettes; 17,6 % started using electronic cigarettes and 14,7 % initiated using heated tobacco products. Menthol cigarettes were perceived as harmful as non-menthol cigarettes among most of the respondents regardless of their experience with menthol tobacco. The attitude towards the flavoring regulation differs depending whether the respondent was a menthol cigarette smoker.

Conclusion: This study brings new evidence about prevalence data and patterns of use of menthol cigarettes among university students in the Czech Republic. The research indicates there have been changes in smoking behavior following the menthol flavoring ban in May 2020. However, there is no direct link between the ban and results of this study.

Key words: tobacco, smoking, students, menthol cigarettes, questionnaire survey