

Vaping: Insights from young people and professionals

April 2023

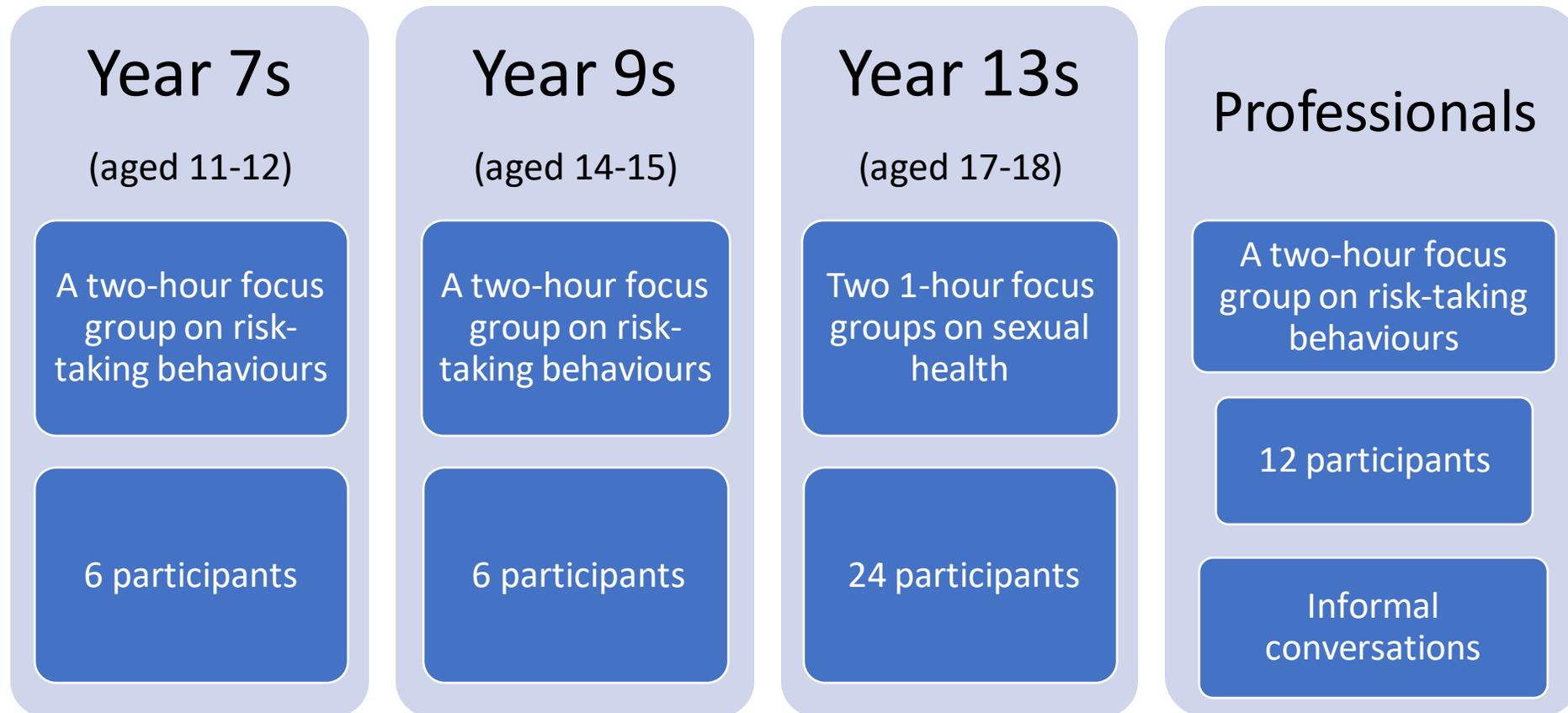
Qualitative Insight Team, Public Health – Wirral Council

Abigail Yeates



Background

These findings relating to vaping are taken from a number of engagements the Qualitative Insight Team have done with young people and professionals between October 2022 and March 2023:



Prevalence of vaping

Vaping was perceived to have overtaken smoking as a popular trend. Year 7 and 9 students said that vaping was popular in the school toilets, while Year 13s said the college's smoking area is always full of people vaping.

Professionals are seeing vaping starting at young ages – an example was given of a primary school student using vapes to manage ADHD.

*“It's more vaping, you won't catch someone with a cigarette in the toilets, it's just vapes”
(Year 9 student)*

*“You should see the smoking area, its always full with people vaping”
(Year 13 student)*

*“All I get from schools is about vaping, how it's being managed, how it's being mismanaged”
(Professional)*

The 'allure' of vaping

The smell, taste and visual appearance of vapes were thought to be encouraging young people to try them. There was concern that vapes are being marketed to young people as a healthier option to cigarettes.

*"The smell and the taste is really alluring"
(Year 13 student)*

*"Vaping is advertised as being more healthy [than smoking], but really its just as serious"
(Year 9 student)*

*"We learn it [the dangers of vaping] in PSE, but people just think they're cool. It's like a trend now"
(Year 9 student)*

Access to vapes

Year 13 students described how they purchase vapes from the corner shop near the college. Year 7, 9 and 13 students raised concerns with how easy it is for people who are under age to access vapes. They also recognised that vendors may misinform young people about the health risks of vaping.

*“Some shops sell vapes to under-age kids because they just want the money, and they don’t want to listen”
(Year 7 student)*

*“They say they’ll ask for ID, but they never do”
(Year 13 student)*

*“[Shops] might lie and say it’s not dangerous”
(Year 9 student)*

*“Adults are buying vapes for young people”
(Professional)*

Gaps in young people's knowledge

There was uncertainty among young people around what vapes contain, their possible dangers to health, and their addictiveness.

*"It might damage your lungs"
(Year 7 student)*

*"You can become addicted quite easily"
(Year 9 student)*

*"Everyone does it now, but some people don't know the dangers of it."
(Year 9 student)*

*"You could be allergic"
(Year 7 student)*

*"[The dangers] need to be informed more"
(Year 9 student)*

*"You don't know everything that's in them"
(Year 7 student)*

*"Vaping is advertised as being more healthy [than smoking], but really its just as serious"
(Year 9 student)*

"In the talk we had, they said vaping might actually be worse than smoking" (Year 13 student)

Impact on school experience

A Year 9 student described how vaping impacts their time at school:

- They explained how they don't like the smell of vapes in the school toilets so try cover their mouth and rush out
- They were concerned about getting the smell on their clothes and being accused of vaping
- They said that checks for vapes before exams causes them additional stress

“You go to the toilet just to go to the toilet, not to smoke”

“My nan was like, ‘what’s that?, I can smell something on your blazer’, and I was like, ‘I know, I thinks it’s people vaping in the toilets’”

“They scan you with a metal detector when you come into school...You have to lift your arms up and empty everything out of your pockets before the exams, it’s so stressful. Once it got caught on one of my badges, I was so scared”.

Managing peer pressure

SAYING NO

Year 7 and 9s said that the ability to say no to vaping depends on a young person's:

- Personality
- Confidence
- Anxieties
- Relationships with friends and family
- Fear of being bullied
- Knowledge of what vapes contain

Some students felt more confident to say no than others.

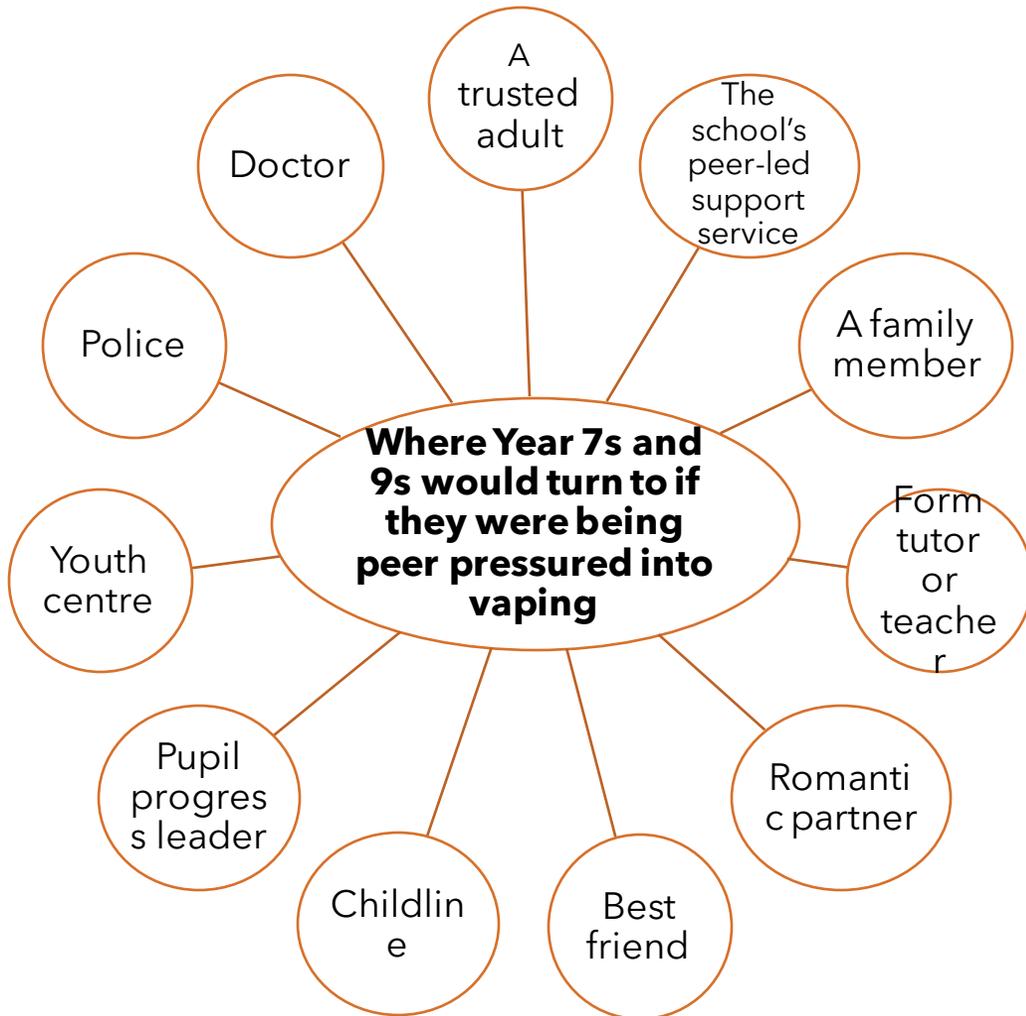
"It depends on how people cope with certain situations"
(Year 9 student)

"She can't tell anyone she doesn't want to do it, because they'll all bully her."
(Year 9 student)

"Just say no. If you don't know what it is then say no."
(Year 9 student)

"Underage vaping is just stupid"
(Year 7 student)

Getting support



BARRIERS TO GETTING SUPPORT

Fear of:

- Gossiping, fallouts and name calling
- *“Mates could turn on you”*
- *“Telling the wrong person”*
- Teachers escalating issues to senior staff
- Getting told off by parents
- *“Overprotective parents”*
- Detention/exclusion/suspension
- Breaches to confidentiality

Challenges of regulating vaping

- Professionals that work closely with schools said that managing vaping is a big concern for schools at the moment.
- Professionals noted that there is a lack of consistency in how different schools address substance misuse and vaping. Regulating what goes on in the school toilets is also difficult.
- Professionals pointed out that it can be hard for teachers/professionals to educate about the risks of vaping when there is conflicting information.
- Year 9 students highlighted that vapes are easy to hide in blazer pockets.

*“All I get from schools is about vaping, how it’s being managed, how it’s being mismanaged”
(Professional)*

*“Its hard when there’s no consistency across schools”
(Professional)*

*“[Vaping is] difficult to challenge and to work around when there’s conflicting information about what’s safe and what’s not.”
(Professional)*

*“Disposing of vapes can mean extra paperwork for the school”
(Professional)*

Thank you.

Qualitative Insight Team

Email: qualitativeinsightteam@wirral.gov.uk

