

Sociocultural factors and blunt use: Perspectives of young Black men in Long Beach, CA

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Background

- Young Black men (YBM) are disproportionately affected by tobacco-related illnesses and deaths^(Broun et al., 2022).
- Blunt smoking, hollowed cigar (tobacco leaf) wrappers filled with a mixture of marijuana and tobacco, is more common among YBM than men of other racial/ethnic groups^(Broun et al., 2022).
- Blunt users are at increased risk for nicotine exposure and addiction and may be unaware of this^(Broun et al., 2022).

Purpose

To explore the relationship between sociocultural factors and blunt use within a small sample of YBM using qualitative data collected from a TRDRP-funded study, Exploring Tobacco Exposure from Recreational Marijuana (E-TERM).

Methodology

Participants and Procedures

- Virtual and in-person semi-structured interviews (n=8) and focus groups (n=3) with YBM (ages 18-30) between November 2022 and February 2023.
- Participants were recruited from the L.A. County area with the total number of 23 participants recruited.
- Recruitment strategies such as social media posts, flyers, and in-person events were used.

Measures

- Facilitators explored topics including the context and setting of marijuana use among YBM who reported using blunts.
- For this study, a subset of the data were used such as attitudes, the methods and risks of mixing marijuana and tobacco, and the influences of social factors such as setting, family and peer support.

Data Analysis

- Interviews and groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- A rapid qualitative analysis technique was utilized to identify themes.

Thematic Analysis Results

YBM expressed concern over blunt products being laced with highly addictive substances when sharing with strangers.

YBM reported high community acceptance and norms of smoking blunts. Participants shared that blunts are the most common and preferred method to smoke marijuana with peers and family members.

YBM described it is common for community members to use blunts as a method to relax and socialize with each other. Participants also mentioned that smoking blunts can be a way to create new relationships by making them feel more connected and at ease with others.

Factors that may be contributing to higher consumption of blunts are the portability, lack of monitoring of the number of blunts smoked, and techniques of packing marijuana into blunts to allow more people to smoke blunts in group settings.

YBM are concerned with safety when sharing blunts in a group setting

"[When smoking alone] you know what you are pulling out and putting on the weed table. You know what you are putting in that blunt." [FG3, P3]

"I'm just saying I agree because sometimes you just don't know. Smoking with a stranger they might have something laced in there. It's always better to have your own so you know what you're smoking and there's no surprises. Sometimes you just don't know." [FG1, P1]

Blunt Use Highly Accepted among YBM

"I think for the most part, smoking is a social thing. You know, you smoke blunts because the people around you smoke blunts. You smoke spliffs because somebody showed you." [Int 7]

"I started smoking when I was about like 13 years old. Like I was in definitely in middle school and I've just been doing it for so long now that it's just kind of like second nature to me. My parents know, like everybody knows" [Int 8]

YBM use Blunts as a means for Socialization

"I think it can create social relationships for people to have connections in another person sometimes? There is some people that, you know, are such introverts and then they smoke, and they can feel a little relaxed and talk to people and it's not a violent [drug]." [FG 3, P2]

"For me, I usually only smoke like in social gatherings or events, it depends. I usually see it more as a social activity. So, I basically never smoke by myself" [FG 3, P4]

YBM Shared Common Blunt Use Patterns

"I mean, the biggest factor [for blunt use], you know, I'm someone who likes, you know, having things be mobile and portable. So, yeah, that, that's a huge point." [Int 6]

"One blunt will probably last me a couple of hours. If I smoke with someone else, yeah, we will probably smoke the whole blunt." [FG 1, P2]

Lessons Learned

By participating in the LINK program and collaborating with CHER:

- Gained knowledge about potential risks for nicotine exposure among YBM.
- Gained experience working with qualitative data by transcribing and analyzing interviews and focus groups with E-TERM study participants.
- Participated in weekly meetings with the CHER team.
- Develop an abstract and a poster based on research findings.

Conclusion

YBM in this sample described blunt smoking as common and accepted in their communities. Given the health risks associated with smoking cigars and blunts, additional research is needed to inform interventions and policies aimed at lowering smoking-related illnesses in this community. Our findings suggest that programs and policies addressing sociocultural factors may help mitigate blunt/cigar smoking disparities.

Acknowledgments

- This work was supported by the United States Department of Agriculture – NIFA under Award No. 2021-77040-34904.
- The data used for this project were obtained through funding from The Regents of the University of California, Research Grants Program Office, Tobacco Related Disease Research Program (TRDRP), Grant Number T32IP5376. The opinions, findings, and conclusions herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of The Regents of the University of California, or any of its programs.
- Thank you to the Center for Health Equity Research team and Center for Latino Community Health.