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## **The Problem of Vaping in Berkeley County Youth**

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COUN 6785: Social Change in Action:  
Prevention, Consultation, and Advocacy

**Social Change Portfolio**

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## OVERVIEW

**Keywords:** West Virginia, Berkeley County, e-cigarettes, vaping, youth, prevention programs, interventions

### The Problem of Vaping in Berkeley County Youth

**Goal Statement:** The goal of my Social Change Portfolio is to establish a prevention program that can be initiated in middle schools and other community sources here in Berkeley County, to help educate our youth on the negative effects and consequences of vape use. I would also like to reduce the use of vapes in middle school through high school-age students by 2% every year for the next six years. I will help accomplish this goal by providing educational classes to both parents and students at least two times a year during special events like red ribbon week and spirit week. I will also try to recruit guest speakers to who the youth can relate, like social media personalities that may be trending on platforms like youtube, Instagram, or tik tok.

**Significant Findings:** According to the CDC, the most common form of tobacco product use in youth is the e-cig (CDC, 2020). Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model (SEM) was developed to help understand how humans develop relationships in the social system levels of family, friends, neighborhoods, organizations, and society (Campbell, 2021). Vaping is a serious issue that needs to be exposed and prevention programs need to be started at least in middle school-age youth, if not elementary-age youth.

**Objectives/Strategies/Interventions/Next Steps:** Strategies to prevent and reduce the use of e-cigarettes in Berkeley County youth need to be approached on all levels.

- Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is the best prevention theory for my population of youth that vape. It focuses on the fact that individual factors, environmental factors, and human behavior all influence each other (National Cancer Institute, 2005).
  - On an individual level youth need to be educated so that they can make a healthy choice. On a relationship/community level, the youth need to be surrounded by positive influences and participate in productive and healthy community events and programs. Finally, on a societal level, the marketing strategies and famous personalities on social media need to be directing the youth in a constructive direction.
  - A few prevention programs that are based on SCT are CATCH My Breath (CMB) (Kelder et al., 2021) and the “Above the Influence” (ATI) campaign (Calder and Schulze, 2015).
  - A community-level program that was launched by the FDA in 2014 to reduce the use of tobacco among youth is *The Real Cost* campaign. In 2018 e-cigs were added to this campaign (SAMHSA, n.d.)
  - The other piece to helping our youth is to advocate *for* and *with* them as well as getting them resources that they may not be able to obtain on their own. When counselors do this they should use the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) as a guide to be sure they are acting in an ethically and culturally competent manner.
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## INTRODUCTION

### The Problem of Vaping in Berkeley County Youth

E-cig, vape, vape pen, Juul. These are all terms used by the youth to describe the latest craze and epidemic that is taking place in the middle school and high school bathrooms. Vape is defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) as “to inhale vapor through the mouth from a usually battery-operated electronic device (such as an [electronic cigarette](#)) that heats up and vaporizes a liquid or solid”. Vaping is modern-day smoking but without the smoke. Although the vapor can still be inhaled and can be inhaled by others that are in the area. E-cigs also contain nicotine and can come in different flavors (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2020). It is no wonder our youth today are becoming addicted. Media and peer pressure do not help to curb the appeal of these modern-day cigarettes. Throughout this paper, I will refer to these devices that are known as e-cigarettes and other various names, as vapes.

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## PART 1: SCOPE AND CONSEQUENCES

### The Problem of Vaping in Berkeley County Youth

Although Berkeley County is ranked the 11<sup>th</sup> healthiest out of 55 counties in West Virginia, the problem with youth vaping has been on the rise (CDC, n.d.). Reports from my children who attend the local middle and high schools say that it is an all-day, everyday occurrence to find kids in the bathrooms at school vaping. According to the CDC, the most common form of tobacco product use in youth is the e-cig. These devices are used more by youth than adults. The CDC says 2.8% of middle school students and 11.3% of high school students in 2021 reported using e-cigs in the last 30 days. This is a total of 2.06 million U.S. middle and

high school students (CDC, 2020). In 2018, 7.6% of young adults aged 18 to 24 reported current use, which is a 46% increase from 2014 (Rath et al., 2021).

The consequences of our youth vaping are that it is bad for their health and can lead to the use of other drugs. Also, the pressure being put on those youth who do not want to vape can be considered a form of bullying, which can cause stress and anxiety. Because vapes are a rather new product, there is not as much research and statistics on them as there are on traditional tobacco cigarettes. The CDC does say that these devices contain nicotine which can affect the brain development of youth. They also shared that there are toxins in the aerosol that can be harmful to the lungs (CDC, 2020). With the rampant use of these devices in the schools, the education of our youth is being affected because they are going to the bathrooms to vape rather than remaining in their classrooms to learn. The use of vapes by our youth can be seen from a personal to a worldwide level, with negative effects and consequences. This includes the state of our economy because vape use is making children unhealthy and requiring them to need more medical care, which has a negative influence on our countries budget.

The goal of my Social Change Portfolio is to establish a prevention program that can be initiated in middle schools and other community sources here in Berkeley County, to help educate our youth on the negative effects and consequences of vape use. I would also like to reduce the use of vapes in middle school through high school-age students by 2% every year for the next six years. I will help accomplish this goal by providing educational classes to both parents and students at least two times a year during special events like red ribbon week and spirit week. I will also try to recruit guest speakers to who the youth can relate, like social media personalities that may be trending on platforms like youtube, Instagram, or tik tok.

## PART 2: SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

### The Problem of Vaping in Berkeley County Youth

The social-ecological model (SEM) of American psychologist, Bronfenbrenner, was developed to help understand how humans develop relationships in multiple social system levels. Some of these social systems include family, friends, neighborhoods, organizations, and society. He also stressed that human development is “a persistent change in how a person understands and interacts with his or her environment” (Campbell, 2021, p. 2). The risk and protective factors within these systems influence the positive and negative outcomes of an individual’s behavior. This is an important concept when it comes to the substance use and abuse of products like the vapes that have become a serious problem within the school systems of our youth. The risk factors are characteristics that we see before the negative outcome, whereas protective factors are the characteristics that prevent or reduce the negative outcome (SAMHSA, n.d.).

The use of vapes by youth in middle and high schools starts on an individual level. Something that can be seen as a risk, or a protective factor is the individual’s perception about vapes and if they are harmful to your health (Osman et al., 2019). I feel this can go both ways, in that the way the youth think about the harm to their health based on smoking vapes gives you a negative or positive outcome. One child may think it is very harmful and this could be a protective factor, and another may think it is not harmful so this would become a risk factor.

Now let’s look at the relationship level of risk and protective factors. This level can be influenced by both peers and family. Osman et al. (2019) stated that vapes are seen as a social product that is used when hanging out with friends. This can also go both ways depending on the perspective of the youth and their peers. If youth think that smoking vapes make you look cool it would be a risk factor, while if the youth feel smoking vapes makes you look stupid or uncool, this could be a protective factor.



On the community level, the risk and protective factors can be influenced by the schools, churches, and community groups (Boys and Girls Club). Zimmerman & Farrell (2017) showed that substance use increases in both youth and adults in neighborhoods with more opportunities for substance use. This would be considered a risk factor. A protective factor on the neighborhood level might be the involvement of youth in their local church or Boys and Girls Club because these are places that encourage healthy activities for youth to participate in.

Finally, there are the risk and protective factors that are involved on a societal level. Something that is seen as a big influence on youth at this level is the marketing of tobacco products (Osman et al., 2019.) Youth are exposed to commercials and ads on TV and the internet. The tobacco companies paint a picture of fun, wealth, and popularity with the use of their products. These companies also appeal to the youth with colorful packaging and flavors that seem almost like a form of candy. Another tactic used by the vape marketing people is that they stress that this is a safe form of smoking and is not as harmful to your health as traditional cigarettes. All these marketing strategies can be seen as risk factors for youth. One example of a protective factor is the YouTube personalities that are popular with today's youth who put out messages showing these products in a negative light. My son follows Baylen Lavine, who just recently came out with the "Frick Vape" merch. It is nice to see that some of the messages are youth are seeing are positive and influence them in a good way, in a sense.

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## PART 3: THEORIES OF PREVENTION

### The Problem of Vaping in Berkeley County Youth

A good theory of prevention fits the issue and population you are working with. It gives direction and structure to the problem at hand and helps the counselor to map out a way to

address the behaviors of the target population. The characteristics of a useful theory are that it is “logical, consistent with everyday observations, similar to those used in previous successful programs, and supported by past research in the same area of related ideas” (National Cancer Institute, 2005, p. 7).

I feel that Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is the best prevention theory for my population of youth that vape. This theory developed by Albert Bandura focuses on the fact that individual factors, environmental factors, and human behavior all influence each other. Some of its key concepts include “reciprocal determinism, behavioral capability, expectations, self-efficacy, observational learning, and reinforcements” (National Cancer Institute, 2005, p. 45). The CATCH My Breath (CMB) prevention program was developed with SCT as its foundation. This is a prevention intervention program that was developed in 2016 in response to the e-cig pandemic in middle and high schools. CMB can be used as a stand-alone program or as part of a tobacco prevention program. It is the first e-cig prevention program developed for middle school students in the US. The studies show that the CMB program had a positive effect on increasing the knowledge about substance use and decreasing the actual use of e-cigs with middle school students (Kelder et al., 2021).

Calder and Schulze (2015) used SCT and self-efficacy theory (SET) as their conceptual base for the research on a psycho-educational program that used audio-visual media to prevent adolescent substance abuse. Because of advancements and trends in technology, interactive media is a good way to reach our youth today. The “Above the Influence” (ATI) campaign was a resource used in the program. This campaign was focused on helping youth to stand up to negative pressure. This works perfectly with the population of youth that vape because one of the main factors that influence the youth to first try and then continue to use e-cigs is the peer

pressure from their friends and classmates. This research showed that watching the videos of other adolescents' stories of using substances, made them reflect on their lives and helped them to see that they did not want to do these things that could harm them. The research showed the youth who participated in this study were made more knowledgeable of substance use and its effects on them, how it affects their relationships, and communication with family and peers. It also inspired the youth to self-reflect, self-regulate, and be assertive in resisting the use of drugs (Calder and Schulze, 2015).

SCT is the right fit for a prevention theory when it comes to the problem of youth vaping in Berkeley County. The two programs that I visited above can be utilized as great tools in the school systems and could be started at an elementary level with a bit of tweaking and adjusting. These programs would be multiculturally inclusive and could be implemented on a community level to help reach those that may not be in the school systems.

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## PART 4: DIVERSITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### The Problem of Vaping in Berkeley County Youth

The American Counseling Association's (ACA) mission statement stresses the importance of making our society a better place while enhancing the lives of all living in it. They do this by developing confident and capable professional counselors and strengthening the counseling profession. But the top goal with all of this is "to promote respect for human dignity and diversity" (ACA, 2014, p. 2). This mission will be critical to follow when working with the youth in my community. The teens and preteens that make up our middle and high school

population of youth that vape in Berkeley County is made up of a diverse and unique group of individuals.

Within this unique and multicultural group of youth in the schools there is a rising problem of vaping. The statistics of the US Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) (2016) from 2011 to 2015 showed that the middle school population did not show a gender difference when it came to the number of youth who had ever used an e-cig. But when it came to the high school population there was a higher percentage of use among the males. This was the period from when e-cigs were first introduced to when they started developing more styles and flavors. With this trend, the schools started to introduce prevention programs in schools. When looking at the WV Department of Health and Human Resources (WVDHHR) (2020) statistics a few years later, 2015 to 2017, it showed that the percentage of WV youth smoking e-cigs was a higher percentage than the national numbers. When breaking it down by gender it showed that in general, female use was increasing faster than males but that males more commonly reported daily or frequent use.

The mix of both female and male increases in the use of vapes in WV youth shows that prevention programs need to be targeted at both genders. I think one way to do this is to encourage teachers, leaders, and media personalities of both genders, as well as those who claim other gender identities, to teach and lead these prevention program efforts. Also, more famous personalities like the one I mentioned in section 2, Baylen Lavine, who encourages abstaining from the use of these harmful products should be rewarded and promoted for teaching and directing our youth in a positive direction. This plays into Section A.2.c of the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) that says to explain and communicate information in a way that the client can understand “in ways that are both developmentally and culturally appropriate” (p. 4). What better

way to do this than on Youtube videos and through those iconic people that our youth are watching on all the latest social media outlets. But we must also use the unique and diverse members of the community to help spread the message that these vapes are harmful to our youth and give them the support they need when they are trying to stop using these addictive products.

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## PART 5: ADVOCACY

### The Problem of Vaping in Berkeley County Youth

Counselors are known to be agents of change and have practiced advocacy since they have come into existence. Advocacy is an action taken by a counselor to eradicate barriers to a client's wellness and quality of life. Advocacy has two goals: 1) empower the client and 2) promote change in the client's environment to help them reach a positive state of well-being (Toporek et al., 2009).

The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) give counselors a map of how to carry out advocacy in practice, theory, and through research (MSJCC, 2015). Advocacy can be done on an individual, institutional, community, and public policy level. The four factors that develop a counselor into a competent multicultural and social justice agent are "1) counselor self-awareness 2) client worldview 3) counseling relationship and 4) counseling and advocacy interventions" (MSJCC, 2015, p. 3).

Advocacy has its barriers and those barriers can exist on any level from individual to public policy. Advocating for the youth who vape in Berkeley County can be done on all levels through different media sources. Because I am targeting teens and preteens at the middle school level, video games and texting programs like *Smokescreen* and *This is Quitting* are a great place to start on an individual level. Then we can move into the school level with the *Catch my Breath*

program that I mentioned in part three. A community-level program that was launched by the FDA in 2014 to reduce the use of tobacco among youth is *The Real Cost* campaign. In 2018 e-cigs were added to this campaign (SAMHSA, n.d.). The barrier to using these programs that involve media is that not all teen and pre-teen youth in this community may have access to devices like cell phones, computers, or gaming systems to utilize the programs. One way to advocate for those who do not have these devices available to them is to use local libraries, churches, and other community resources that may have these kinds of devices available for youth to check out, borrow, or use during a certain period.

The public policy level of advocacy can be done by increasing the price of vaping products as well as fighting for licensing and zoning stipulations of where these products can be sold. West Virginia is one of the states that consider e-cigs a “tobacco product” and tax them at the same rate as cigarettes. This has been shown to reduce the use of the teen population who do not have the money to buy these products when the price goes up. (SAMHSA, n.d.). The barrier here is that these solutions are not instant fixes and have to be passed through laws and legislation.

Counselors are social change agents and advocacy is an important part of what makes them successful at building and maintaining relationships with their clients. The MSJCC is a great guide for competent counselors and should be revisited and reviewed regularly throughout their careers. Advocating for clients is a way to push through barriers that prevent these individuals from feeling safe, secure, and empowered. Counselors need to lead the charge and be the change that will make this world a better place!

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