Reviewer's report

Title: Occasional alcohol use and obesity in community medicine patients

Version: 1 Date: 22 February 2005

Reviewer: alessandra tavani

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper considers an interesting and debated issue on the relation between alcohol, other factors and obesity. The paper has some value, but it needs substantial revision as the methods are not well described and the results on alcohol are based on a questionable classification of the variable. Consequently all the discussion and interpretation need to be revised according to the new results.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1) The title is not appropriate, as the paper considers not only alcohol drinking, but also other risk factors for obesity.
2) A lot of caution must be given to the finding that smoking is inversely related with obesity, as anyway smoking must not be considered a preventive measure for any condition. This must be pointed out clearly in the abstract and throughout the manuscript.
3) Results of the Abstract: "In comparison to non drinkers, people who consumed alcohol 1-14 days per month ...." Do the author know how much alcohol? Although they are all occasional drinkers, depending on the amount drunk, these people can be heavy or moderate drinkers.
4) Background, 3rd paragraph, 8th line: "Investigators from ...." This should be a different paragraph to avoid confusion between risk factors for obesity and risk factors for chronic diseases, as cigarette smoking is favourable on obesity risk, but extremely dangerous for many chronic diseases.
5) Background, before citing reference 11: It must be specified that reference 11 refer to chronic disease and not specifically to obesity, for which smoking is not a risk factor.
6) Background, last three words: I would omit "as risk factors", as it is ambiguous for the same reasons specified above.
7) No information is given in the Methods on how variables of interest were collected. For instance, smoking information appears to include number of cigarettes/day; did it include also duration, age at starting or other time-related factors? Did the information on drinking include only number of days/month in which the subjects drunk, or also if it was regular drinking, the amount drunk, etc? These type of information should be given in the Methods for each variable of interest.
8) Results, 2nd paragraph, 2nd sentence: "Age 46 to 55 ...." this sentence is not clear. It could be something like "subjects aged 46 to 55 years and those with more frequent mental distress are more often obese. Cigarette smokers were more often lean, independently of number of cigarettes smoked".
9) Results, 2nd paragraph, 3rd sentence: A new paragraph should start here because the text refer to a new Table and include all the rest of the results, which should not be divided further in paragraphs.
10) Results, 3rd paragraph, 3rd sentence: "In comparison ....." Too few subjects are included in the 15 or more category and the results are not informative. I would suggest to change the cut-point to the median value, and report this finding on 15 or more in the text of the Results.
11) Table 1 and 2 should be put together, as they give the same information for different variables.
12) Table 1: for 46 subjects there was no information on BMI. These subjects can be excluded from the analysis and this mentioned in the Methods.
13) The percentage of male/female and by educational status are wrong, as the sum is not close to 100 in the "overall" column.
14) I would suggest to put numbers rather than percentages in the "overall" column. Percentages by column are confusing, as they are by line in the other two columns of the Table.
15) Table 3: variables included in the regression models should be listed in the legend of the Table.
16) All the discussion related to alcohol drinking should wait for a better analysis of results and the very recent paper from Breslow and Smothers (Am J Epid 161: 368, 2005). Also the paper from Colditz et al (Am J Clin Nut 54: 49, 1991) should be mentioned.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1) I would suggest to omit the second and the fourth sentences of the Conclusions of the Abstract. I would report also that hours watching television should be reduced, while smoking, although its effect on body weight must be stopped, because of other more deleterious effect on general health.
2) I would suggest to eliminate the the second last paragraph of the background.
3) I am surprised that in the USA a low-income population with 25-26% of people worried about having enough food, may have such a relatively high educational level.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests