Author's response to reviews

Title: Prevalence of HPV high and low risk types in cervical samples from the Italian general population: a population based study.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer 1

Second review of the manuscript entitled “Prevalence of HPV high and low risk types in cervical samples of the Italian general population: a population based study”
The corrections made by the authors are in line with my first review and have improved the manuscript.

Re: We thank the reviewer.

Finally, minor corrections or discretionary revisions could be made:
- Don’t start a paragraph with numbers, i.e. in page 10 it will be simpler: “In this study, 3817 women.....”

Re: OK: we avoided starting sentences with numbers.

- I don’t find: “high and low risk HPV (HR HPV or LR HPV)”

Re: OK: we added the acronym specification in the abstract and in the text.

- In page 11 they repeat three times p value: one is enough.

Re: Actually, the three p values are related to three different tests: the first two tests assessed the significance of the slope (i.e. whether each slope is different from zero), the third p value indicates whether the two slopes are significantly different from each other (i.e. if the HR slope is significantly steeper than the LR one).

- For first sentence in discussion (page13) I suggest: “The overall prevalence of HPV in Italy is higher than ...., as it is shown in table 4.”

Re: OK: we inverted the order of the two sentences at the beginning of the discussion.

- In page 14, I don’t understand: “Figure 2 compares the curves of HR HPV prevalence of infection by age in the Italian studies published until now: WHILE they show .....”

Re: OK: we dropped “while”.

- In the conclusions of the abstract (page 1), I also suggest for first sentence: “Because cervical cancer incidence and Pap test coverage is lower in southern than in northern Italy, a lower prevalence of high-risk infections in the general population was expected in the south. However, prevalence .....”

Re: We accepted this suggestion: the sentence now sounds much better. Thank you.
Reviewer 2

The presentation of the paper has been improved in the current version. However the paper remains too long and it should be substantially shortened.

Re: We carefully analysed our manuscript with the aim of shortening it. The paper reports the typing study and a systematic review of the previous literature on HPV prevalence in healthy women. It is 4200 words long and contains 2 figures, one small box and 4 tables. The methods section is longer than 1600 words, while the other sections are quite short (400 words the introduction, 1100 words the discussion and 900 the results). One of the reasons for submitting our manuscript to BMC Infectious Diseases was the absence of word limit in this on-line publication, which allowed us to give a detailed description of any protocols we used. Therefore, we decided not to shorten our manuscript while improving its readability. A way to make our paper easy to read is to refine its subheadings structure. We split the text into small paragraphs, thus allowing the reader to find what interests him most and skip other topics. We hope the editor will understand and agree on this decision. If the editor finds it appropriate, we will be willing to move part of the molecular methods into a separate link.

Major point:
An explanation should be given about the apparent increase in HPV prevalence in Southern Italy. Recent change in the sexual behaviour of this population?
Re: We added a sentence, pag. 15: “In the last decades, rapid changes in sexual behaviours occurred in Italy, particularly in younger people. It is plausible that the cultural and behavioural changes occurred earlier in northern than in southern Italy”.

Minor points:
Page 5: The sentence "The total population in 2007 was 5.71 and 1.18 million women for southern Italy and Rome and province, respectively" is not clear. Please, clarify.
Re: Rome is not part of southern Italy (it is in central Italy according to the classification of the National Institute of Statistics), but was included in this study because the NTCC study did not recruit in the metropolitan area of Rome.

Page 6:
- Sample collection: Citech, Qiagen: please, specify cities and countries
- HPV testing: HCII, Digene sample conversion kit: please, indicate the manufacturers

Re: OK, we specified the details as suggested.

Page 7: Typing procedure. Do not underline "DNA extraction". The sentence should be written as follows: For DNA extraction, 1.5 ml of sample....

Re: OK, we changed the sentence.