Reviewer’s report

Title: Current smoking behaviour among rural South African children: Ellisras Longitudinal Study

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Reviewer: Rob Mcgee

Reviewer’s report:

Overall, I believe the authors have made a good case for the research reported here. In the interests of tobacco control in South Africa, good information is required concerning the rates of smoking among young people. The author's research suggests that the rates of cigarette smoking among young men in this rural community are not "too bad". with about 1 in every 10 smoking. Interestingly there was little tobacco use of any kind among young women. This stands in contrast to the situation in many developed countries where young women outnumber young men.

The research itself looks to have been carried out in a competent manner. However, its not clear what the response rate is. How many children are enrolled in the ELS research? Its not clear if the 1654 children represent all the children enrolled or a sub-sample. Under the section on "Quality control" information is reported about the training of field workers; its not clear what "intra tester technical error of measurements ranged from 97 to 100%...." means. Does it refer to agreement on coding of responses.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

The manuscript does need major editing to ensure that spelling and grammatical expression is improved. Several sentences are unclear in their meaning. In the Introduction, some of the references do not obviously seem to apply to some of the statements. The statement that on the first page of the Background that "...insome developed countries where the number of smokers has currently stabilized at 25%" is referenced by a paper on smoking in Brazil [10].

In the Results section, a lot of data are presented. In Table 1, given the low N in some of the ages (eg. N < 100 in boys and girls ages 11, 12 and 18 years), I would be inclined to group the ages as 11-12 years, 13-14 years,15-16 years and 17-18 years. By doing this, trends are a little clearer. For example, the prevalences of cigarette smoking among the boys in these 4 age ranges are 4.9%, 9.3%, 10.4% and 17.1% which suggests an increasing age trend.

It would be of interest to examine some of the statistical associations between smoking/use tobacco products and beliefs about smoking (table 2), friends and parents smoking (Table 3), and attitudes (Table 4). How do the children that smoke differ from those that don't. The use of Home made products is also of interest.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests