Reviewer's report

Title: Adult Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and nicotine use: a qualitative study of patient perceptions.

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Reviewer: Nicole P. Yuan

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The purpose of this paper was to examine patients' perceptions and beliefs regarding the relationships between ADHD and cigarette smoking. The background was well-written and well-researched with data on comorbidity rates and two theoretical models (self-medication and behavioral disinhibition). The authors also highlighted the value of qualitative research on the perceptions of smoking among individuals diagnosed with ADHD. My enthusiasm for the paper, however, was dampened by weaknesses in the research questions, sample size, methods, qualitative analyses, and interpretation findings. I hope the authors find my comments useful for future revisions of their paper. I consider all of my comments as “major compulsory revisions” because they affect the assessment of the quality and significance of the research study.

1. On page 3, the authors described the purpose of their study. The description does not provide enough detail to allow the reader to understand their research questions and assess whether they successfully answered them. Did the authors specifically ask the patients for them to identify “links between ADHD and cigarette smoking”? How did they define “links” in the study and interview? It is also unclear what the authors studied with regards to “role of context” and “influence of prescription medications on tobacco use.” Further elaboration is needed to fully understand what the authors investigated. It would also be helpful to provide more detail about what they examined with regards to other non-prescribed psychotropic substances. It is not until page 8 in the results section that it became clear that they examined the role of these substances on ADHD and not tobacco use.

2. In general, the inclusion of the research question and findings on the role of non-prescribed substances on ADHD in the paper was not well justified. Given that the main purpose was examining the experiences and perceptions of tobacco use, I would recommend removing that part of the study from the current paper.

3. On page 3, the authors indicated that the sample consisted of 12 individuals who participated in a larger study consisting of 134 adult patients with ADHS. I felt there was insufficient detail regarding the recruitment methods of the 12 individuals. I recommend that the authors provide information about selection of participants from the larger study, including inclusion and exclusion criteria. I also suggest that they indicate how many participants were contacted, how many agreed to participate, how many declined, and how many could not be reached.
It was unclear if the authors conducted convenient or purposeful sampling.

4. On page 3, the authors described the interview procedures and questions. A number of questions were raised that made it difficult to assess the quality of the data collection methods. For example, what “narrative opening questions” were used? Did they include a question about “links between ADHD and cigarette smoking”? The authors’ description of the interview guide did not include a question about “links.” They also indicated that they explored themes from earlier interviews, but there was no information about the earlier interviews. Who conducted them? When were they conducted? How was that past data used in the current study? I recommend that the authors address these questions as well as indicate whether the past interviews were conducted for the larger study or were from medical records from the outpatient facility. If the latter, did the authors have permission to use that data?

5. There were other critical details missing that limited the assessment of rigor of the qualitative analysis. The authors indicated that the patients received German versions of standardized instruments. It was unclear if the qualitative interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed in German. I recommend that the authors provide this information and describe the process used to translate the findings into English. It was also unclear what experience the research team had with qualitative research and analysis, and what happened when there was disagreement between the two coders.

6. On pages 4-9, the organization and large number of quotes made it difficult to understand the study findings. I recommend that the authors provide longer narrative descriptions of findings, and be more selective of the quotes included in that section. I suggest they include quotes that are particularly insightful or illustrative of a key finding.

7. My concerns about the small sample size of 12 individuals were partially addressed by the authors’ comment that they ended recruitment after reaching saturation. However, repeatedly in the results section, the authors indicated that a finding was reported by one participant or two. It was unclear how saturation was achieved with one or two people’s reports. I wonder if the authors have opportunities to collect more data to fully achieve saturation of some critical findings.

8. In general, theme 3 on “tobacco use as a consequence of comparisons with peers” was unclear and not as well elaborated or supported (only one quote was provided) compared to the other 2 themes. The title of the theme was confusing when read alone and when read in context of the findings.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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.