Reviewer's report

Title: Emotional/behavioural problems and cigarette smoking in adolescence: findings of a Greek cross-sectional study

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Reviewer: Laura Currie

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Title: Emotional/Behavioural problems and cigarette smoking in adolescence: findings from a Greek cross-sectional study.

The authors present an interesting study examining the relationship between emotional/behavioural problems and smoking among a nation-wide, school-based sample of adolescents in Greece. Given the high adult smoking prevalence in Greece and that adult smoking habits are often initiated during adolescence, understanding the psychosocial context of adolescent smoking has important public health implications.

While this is a good paper with much potential, it could be strengthened if it was less an exploratory study and more hypothesis driven. Some interesting mediation or moderation analyses could have provided greater insight into the relationship between these two variables.

Abstract

1) Major essential revision
This needs to be rewritten to make the aims of the current study more clear
Include statistics to support key statements.
Move the response rate/sample size to the results section.

Background

2) Minor essential revision
This section could be improved by providing greater clarity around the aims of the current study and potentially introducing hypotheses to be tested.
At a minimum, the authors should move the 3rd paragraph of this section immediately following the first sentence of the first paragraph. This would allow the section to read more logically.

Methods

3) Major essential revision
If the study methodology has been published in more detail previously, this should be explicitly stated and the study referenced. Otherwise, this section could be strengthened by discussing the sampling procedure further. How were
individual schools selected? How were classes selected? Did all students in a class complete the survey or were students randomly selected?

4) Discretionary revision
In addition, it might be worth mentioning how absenteeism was addressed? Were surveys completed on a make-up day for students selected for participation who were absent? Weitzman et al (2003) suggest that absenteeism and risk behaviour such as smoking tend to correlate and discuss associated biases and possible solutions.

5) Major essential revision
It states ‘Adolescents took parent surveys home’. It is unclear which part of the survey was completed by or with parents. Please clarify. If parents completed any part of the survey, then self reported smoking status should have been used for parental smoking status, rather than using a proxy measure. A rationale for the use of this proxy measure should be included.

6) Minor essential revision
The section discussing response rate and participant characteristics should be moved to the results section.

7) Minor essential revision
Procedures for informed consent and the attainment of ethical approval should be mentioned.

8) Minor essential revision
Measures with generally good reliability were used and well described. It might add further clarity if you provide a rationale for why the dimension of ‘autonomy’ was selected in particular.

9) Discretionary revision
The level of missing data is acceptable at approximately 14%. A statement describing the missing data in context would provide greater transparency.

10) Minor essential revision
While the statistical analysis is sufficiently described, this could be mapped out in more detail particularly if any new analysis is introduced (hypothesis testing, mediation or moderation analyses).

Discussion

11) Major essential revision
The results of this study should be discussed in the context of existing literature examining the relationship between smoking and emotional/behavioural problems. At a minimum, the authors should suggest how the findings of this study fill the gap in the literature identified in the background section and add to the existing literature.
Conclusions

12) Major essential revision
The conclusions could be strengthened with greater reflection on the implications of the study findings for anti-tobacco policies and programmes targeted at youth in Greece or suggestions for future research which could help translate these observational findings into evidence-based policies or interventions.

General style comments

13) Minor essential revisions
Avoid using detailed descriptions of percentages in text (eg. Ten and two tenths percent), rather say approximately ten percent or a tenth of students.
Present percentages consistently – in some instances there are two decimal points and others there is only one or none.

14) Minor essential revisions
Odds ratios should be presented consistently throughout the text; sometimes confidence intervals are provided and other times they are not.

15) Minor essential revisions
Overall the writing is of acceptable quality, although minor language and grammar corrections would improve readability:
- remove ‘enough’ from the last sentence of the conclusions;
- remove first ‘of’ from first sentence of background (should read majority (80-90%) of adults);
- remove ‘of’ from the fourth sentence of participants and procedures sentence;
- add ‘were’ to the sentence ‘and 32.4% were aged more than 15 years in the participants and procedures section;
- first sentence of p.7 should read measured not measure
- first sentence of Statistical Analysis section – ‘quantitative’ should be ‘discreet’

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.