Reviewer’s report

Title: The role of social support and social networks in smoking behavior among middle and older aged people in rural area of South Korea: A cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 28 October 2009

Reviewer: Matthew Meyers

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Overall, this is a very well-researched and contemporarily relevant manuscript. The extent to which social environment impacts health behaviors is not fully understood (albeit perceived to be great), so this and similar research projects are very significant and have great potential for advancing tobacco control efforts. One thing that may strengthen this article is a better description of why this study was done (you note objectives as the further development of effective tobacco control policies and cessation initiatives, but do not discuss how this research can help to achieve that). Background information is very comprehensive, but the addition of information (perhaps observational) on the Korean rural cultural context would help support the findings. Finally, in the discussion little reference is made to the potential implications and limitations of generalizability of this research.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) No major compulsory revisions.

Minor Essential Revisions

2) Spelling errors (such as “regardeless” on page 14-line 9 and “behavrios” on page 15-line 5) and a few grammatical errors.

Discretionary Revisions

3) Further discussion on why higher social support yielded higher likelihood to smoke (seems counter-intuitive). Particularly in the context of stress – social networks and social support can be assumed to help moderate and reduce stress, but people with higher levels of stress (most likely lower social contacts) smoke less.

4) Comment on the limits of self-report especially in the context of perceived social contact and the dichotomous nature of the social network variables. Dichotomous variables seem restrictive in this use in that they place equal weight on each relationship assessed which may not be appropriate. Also, a comment on the importance of religion in the social networks could strengthen its inclusion as a factor.
5) Comment on how using 400 lifetime cigarettes smoked is appropriate for this population in that as elders, they have low rates of cessation and initiation.

6) Discuss the limits of inferences that can be made due to small number of female smokers. Further, comment on how many of the social support factors are external to the individual, making them strong social influences capable of perpetuating social norms with regards to health behaviors such as smoking.

7) Assuming that many of these men and women enrolled are couples, it may be interesting to compare the connection of social networks and social support to smoking within married couples.

8) Discuss how the homogeneity of rural Korean people may help to contribute to the factors being analyzed. Also, elaborate on the conclusion that this provides evidence that for women not to smoke, it is necessary for them to sustain the optimal level of social network (page 14-line 16).

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.