Reviewer's report

Title: Non-specific psychological distress, smoking status and smoking cessation: United States National Health Interview Survey 2005

Version: 1 Date: 14 February 2011

Reviewer: Annette K McClave

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Overall, this paper utilizes a strong, US national data source to address an important topic to public health and tobacco control. I believe if the paper were to be restructured and the analysis modified slightly, it could contribute greatly to the existing body of evidence in this area. Please find my suggestions below:

Major compulsory revisions -
1. There is considerable recent and relevant literature which the authors have not mentioned in their review of the current evidence:

Recently published in the mental health promotion issue of the American Journal of Public Health –


Because this study also used NHIS data to demonstrate that adults with mental illnesses have a harder time in quitting but appear to attempt to quit at the same rate as adults without these illnesses, it would strengthen the authors’ argument to include it as a reference.

Other articles which the authors should consider including:


2. Considering the existing evidence showing that persons with mental illness have problems in quitting smoking (a fairly well known fact) but they try to quit just the same (a more recently elucidated point), I think the important findings which the authors should highlight are those showing what the adults with mental issues used to quit smoking and their self-reported interest in quitting. These are crucial findings in that they highlight the need to tailor specific interventions for this subpopulation of smokers. It is very interesting that the authors found that adults with symptoms of mental illness (Serious Psychological Distress - SPD) used the same methods to quit as adults with no symptoms. I would recommend
the authors reframe their analysis to focus on the methods of cessation and interest in quitting, since these are the behaviors which contribute to the existing literature.

3. The K6 can be scored into a bivariable (the respondent either has SPD or he does not). I would also recommend analyzing this bivariable to compare cessation behaviors and attitudes since this is traditionally how the K6 is used.

4. The results section is clearly missing statistics and numbers which should be inserted throughout.

Minor essential revisions -

1. There appears to be a grammar mistake in line 4 of page 3 (background): “With some find quitting smoking...”

2. On page 4, I would recommend rephrasing, “where mental disorders have been associated with less successful smoking cessation” rather than “lower.”

3. There are no footnotes for the tables or figure which are necessary to interpret these independent of the text.

4. Table 1 is rather confusing in its current state. I would recommend removing the third column since it distracts from the comparison of NHIS to NSMHWB.

5. This paper also adds international comparison data which validate the use of the K6 in national surveys. This should be mentioned at some point as it is a strength of the paper.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests