Author's response to reviews

Title: Trends in socioeconomic inequalities in smoking prevalence, consumption, initiation, and cessation between 2001 and 2008 in the Netherlands. Findings from a national population survey.

Authors:

Gera E Nagelhout (gnagelhout@stivoro.nl)
Dianne de Korte-de Boer (dianne.dekorte@maastrichtuniversity.nl)
Anton E Kunst (a.kunst@amc.uva.nl)
Regina M van der Meer (rvandermeer@stivoro.nl)
Hein de Vries (hein.devries@maastrichtuniversity.nl)
Boukje M van Gelder (boukje.van.gelder@rivm.nl)
Marc C Willemsen (mc.willemsen@stivoro.nl)

Version: 3 Date: 6 April 2012

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear editors and reviewers,

Thank you for asking us to revise our paper. We have addressed the comments made by the reviewers. Our responses to the individual comments from the reviewers are listed below.

Reviewer: Jamie Bryant

An interesting article with a few minor points to be addressed as minor essential revisions. I think the article could be shortened by tightening of the expressions and language used. There is some redundancy throughout the manuscript.

Authors: We have shortened the text of the results section by combining the description of the figures with the description of Table 2.

Abstract
1. ‘Were more likely to be smoker’ is grammatically incorrect.
Authors: We have fixed this.

2. The conclusion of the abstract could be strengthened. The novel aspect of this study is the examination of differences in smoking consumption, initiation ratios and quit ratios, rather than prevalence, which provides information about how SES differences in smoking prevalence originate. A statement about these should be added- currently, only prevalence is addressed.
Authors: Thank you for this suggestion. We have changed the conclusion of the abstract into: “While inequalities in smoking prevalence were stable among Dutch men, they still increased among women, due to widening inequalities in both smoking cessation and initiation. Both components should be addressed in equity-oriented tobacco control policies.”

Introduction
1. The reference provided for the statement ‘Nowadays, mortality rates tend to be higher among lower socioeconomic status (SES) groups in most Western countries [1]’ refers only to European countries. Additional references should be added to support this statement, or the statement changed.
Authors: We have added additional references from Canada and the United States.

2. ‘The higher prevalence of smoking in individuals from lower SES groups is the most important single cause of socioeconomic differences in mortality [2]’. Smoking is a significant contributor to socioeconomic differences in mortality, accounting for up to a third of all differences between those of low and high socio-economic status. See more recent reference by Stringhini S, Sabia S, Shipley M, Brunner E, Nabi H, Kivimaki M, et al. Association of socioeconomic position with health behaviours and mortality. JAMA 2010;303(12):1159-1166.
Authors: Thank you for suggesting this interesting and more recent reference. We have added the reference to the introduction.

References need to be provided for the paragraph outlining the implementation of tobacco control policies in the Netherlands (page 4)
Authors: We have added references to this paragraph.

3. Aims need to be rephrased. Currently there is a change of tense in description of aims and one two.
Authors: Done.

Method
1. Is ‘TNS NIPO’ an acronym? If so, should be spelt out on first use.
Authors: TNS NIPO is not an acronym.

2. The three income categories seem reasonable, but what is the basis for selecting these cut points?
Authors: We selected these cut points because we wanted three about equal sized income groups. We have clarified this in the methods section.

Results
3. Consider using ‘Demographic characteristics’ or ‘Socio-demographic characteristics’ rather than ‘Background characteristics’.
Authors: We have changed background characteristics into demographic characteristics throughout the paper.

Discussion
4. ‘Our findings suggests that’ grammatically incorrect.
Authors: We have fixed this.

Reviewer: Ashleigh Guillaumier
MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS

Abstract
- Background & Conclusions: You refer to the “fourth stage” of the smoking epidemic, however this is not explained until the introduction section of the manuscript. Either rephrase in the abstract, or remove, as this is not common terminology in the area.
Authors: We agree with the reviewer that we cannot use this terminology without explaining it. We have removed it from the abstract.

- Results, first section: “smokers” not “smoker”
Authors: We have fixed this.

- Results: Clarify whether the results you are summarising here are significant results or non-significant trends in the data.
Authors: Done.

Background
- Para 1, 2nd sentence: “single most important” not “most important single”
Para 1, last sentence: commas after Canada, Aus and NZ are in the wrong place – they should appear after the insertion of the in-text citation
Authors: We have fixed this.

Para 2, 3rd sentence: what are the “mixed results” you are referring to. You need to elaborate on this statement, as presumably this is what the manuscript is building on.
Authors: We have elaborated on the mixed results. “One study found that widening SES inequalities in cessation are mostly responsible for widening SES differences in smoking prevalence [8], while the other study found that inequalities in initiation are a more important explanation [18].”

Methods
- Sample, para 2, 3rd sentence: You state that approx. 18,000 participate in the survey – how many people are invited to participate? What is the consent rate?
Authors: Unfortunately, this information is not available. We have asked TNS NIPO to provide this information for future years, but they could not provide it for past years.

Sample, para 2, last sentence: Is there a reference for the weighted data, or is this something the authors have done? If so, more information is required.
Authors: The weights are calculated by TNS NIPO. We do not have a reference, but we did include more information.

Results
- It is not clear to me why you have presented results for the 2001 and 2008 survey results, and then changes across the 8-year time period the survey was tracked for. Please clarify why you are presenting these two sets of results, when presumably the changes over time are of the most interest, and these results would also show the difference between 2001 and 2008.
Authors: The first set of results show whether there are SES differences in smoking, consumption, initiation, and cessation (in 2001 and in 2008). The second set of results show whether these SES differences change (narrow or widen) over time. These are two different research questions, which we think are both of great interest.

Changes in SES inequalities between 2001 and 2008: Please also include the results for changes in male smoking prevalence, initiation and cessation.
Authors: We have now made more explicit in the text that among men educational inequalities in smoking prevalence, initiation, and cessation did not change significantly between 2001 and 2008. We have not stratified the regression analyses for male smoking prevalence, initiation, and cessation by educational level, because the interactions of educational level by trend were not significant.

Discussion
- A discussion of the implications of the results should be included. Also, the reporting of changes in consumption, take up and quit rates is a focal point of the paper – you should elaborate on why it is important to report this data, and what this information could be used for.
Authors: Thank you for this suggestion. We have added to the discussion that it is important that tobacco control programs focus on decreasing smoking initiation and consumption and increasing smoking cessation among the lower educated. It seems that focusing only on either initiation or cessation is insufficient.
DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS

Methods
- Sample, para 1, 3rd sentence: What is TNS NIPO?
  Authors: TNS NIPO is the market research company. We have clarified this in the methods section.

- Questionnaire: “education level” not “educational level” (this is throughout the manuscript).
  Authors: Done.

Results
- SES inequalities in 2001 and 2008: The first paragraph describes the trends in Figures 1 and 2, and the second paragraph gives the significance testing results of this data. I think this section of the results would read better if these two paragraphs were combined and reduced. Currently it reads as if you are repeating results and it becomes a little confusing.
  Authors: We agree with the reviewer that it is better to combine these two paragraphs. We have changed this.

Discussion
- You could consider including a brief comparison of SES smoking trends in other countries
  Authors: We have already briefly described this in the introduction and do not think this should also be included in the discussion.