Reviewer’s report

Title: Sexual behaviour and risk factors for the acquisition of human papillomavirus infections in young people in Italy: suggestions for future vaccination policies

Version: 2 Date: 2 April 2012

Reviewer: Adesegun Fatusi

Reviewer’s report:

MINOR ISSUES

1. Line 6 under questionnaire in methodology section: “min” should be written in full as “minutes”

2. The first sentence under result regarding when the study was carried out should be transferred to methodology section.

3. The initial “A” should be removed from the second to the last sentence under Discussion

4. In Tables 2 and 4, the columns should be appropriately labeled as “age group”

MAJOR ISSUES

5. From its title, this study is aimed at influencing vaccination policies, and in the conclusion there were suggestions about how vaccination can be improved through strategies such as communication interventions. Yet, nothing was said in the manuscript on vaccination rates or vaccination-related behaviour among young people in Italy (or anywhere else). Such information should have constituted a critical part of the “problem statement” or rationale for the study – and be included in the background.

6. Under study population: the sampling procedure, particularly in terms of what sampling methods were used, should be more explicitly explained.

7. Tables 1 and 4 should include percentages (This will be critical in putting some of the other results in correct perspectives, among others; for example, see comment 12, for example)

8. Paragraph 4 of result section (starting with the sentence, “Among females, the mean age...”) should reflect the fact that these figures relate to the sexually experienced proportion of the young people. That should also be made clear in the labeling of the Tables.

9. Paragraph 5 under result, which stated that “younger subjects debut earlier than their older counterparts” (with reference to Table 2) is NOT really correct. It is right only in the context of comparing the proportion of young people that have
ever had sex. Another look at Table 2 will show that whereas only 31% of females 14-16 engaged in sex (the authors used the term “regular sexual activity” in the title of their Table – comments on that later), the proportion was 68.9% for 17-19 years old, and 89% for 20-24 years. Thus, the statistical analysis and the result and its interpretation need to be put in the right context. Is the table (Table 2) talking about those who are sexually experienced, or really those engaging in regular sexual activity. If it is the latter – as the Table is titled – how is “regular sexual activity” defined? The comparison with respect to mean and median age of sexual debut should really relate to ever having had sexual intercourse, and not engaging in regular sexual activity. The sentence under discussion section, which refers to this Table (discussion section, paragraph3, line 10-11) should also be appropriately amended.

10. Paragraph 6, which refers to Table 3: the important findings relating to the Table should be reported rather than mere referring readers to the Table without any report.

11. Discussion section: The authors referred to some findings that were not previously presented in the result section:

• paragraph 3, line 6... “No statistically significant differences were found on considering gender and city of residence (This was even not shown in any table – it should be so indicated when presented in the result section);

• paragraph 6, starting with “our data indicate a low use of condom”: the results presented in the first 4 lines of the paragraph.

It is important to note that all findings should first be presented in result section before expansion on them in the discussion section.

12. Discussion section, paragraph 5, line 3 stated as follows: “Indeed, more males fell into the high risk class than the low- or medium-risk class, while most males were in the low-risk class”. There is doubt about the degree to which this sentence is correct. The authors, as indicated earlier, should include percentages in Table 4. Then, the proportion of males and females falling into each risk category should first be reported in the result, to establish an evidence-based platform for comparing between male and females.

13. Discussion: paragraph 6, line 6, starting with “We surmise that many young people..”: the statement here is not grounded in any evidence in the paper or literature cited anywhere in the paper.

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

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