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

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Reviewer: Àngela Domínguez

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting article dealing with sexual habits among young people in five Italian cities. Because this topic is not well known, the results of this survey can be useful to orient decision-makers in adopting preventive strategies, with independence of the fact that the data collected will be used to parameterize a dynamic mathematical model with a view to acquiring new information about HPV transmission and prevention strategies. The aims, the methods, the statistical analyses and the results are well presented and discussed.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS:

-In the last sentence of abstract the expression “These data confirm the importance…” should be changed to “These data support the importance…”.

-In Questionnaire, the sentence “Self-administration of the questionnaire took about 20 min” should be better changed to “To answer the self-administered questionnaire took…”.

-Study population: The sample in each age group was randomly selected. However, in the results section the first phrase says that the study involved 7449 volunteers. Authors should clarify if these volunteers corresponded to the sample randomly selected. In addition, information about the number of students that refused to participate would be interesting. Is it possible that volunteers were persons with more sexual activity that those that refused? Authors should give their opinion about that.

-Discussion: It would be interesting to have some information about the distribution of risk-classes (table 4) in other studies.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS:

Background

-In the paragraph 5, the sentence “It is known that among 150 different HPV types, only about 60 are able to infect the ano-genital area and that vaccination is a useful tool for preventing HPV infection caused by types more frequently involved.

-The sentence “The data collected will be used to parameterize a dynamic mathematical model with a view to acquiring new information about HPV transmission and prevention strategies” may be deleted, because independently
of this fact the study has public health interest.
- Details about funds can be deleted and passed to the end of the article.

Methods
- The sentence “During completion of questionnaires, communication among the respondents was practically impossible” could be more widely explained.
- Study population: “Age groups“ is a more common denomination than “age-class”. Consider it for changing.
- Discussion: More details about the sentence: “The sample therefore enabled the suitability of the current vaccination strategies in Italy to be evaluated indirectly” would be useful for comprehension, specifically about the meaning of “indirectly”.
- The p-value in the results section appears in capital letter, but not in the statistical analysis section.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest 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 will declare that I have no competing interests.