Reviewer's report

Title: Snus user identity and addiction. A Swedish focus group study on adolescents

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Reviewer: Brent Caldwell

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Snus user identity and addiction – a Swedish focus group study on adolescents. Revision 1.

This is a qualitative study of the experience of snus use by 27 adolescent students at technical colleges in Sweden. The students were interviewed in five focus groups, composed of four to six students per group. Boys and girls were interviewed separately (four groups of boys and one of girls). The aim of the study was to explore adolescents’ views on themselves as snus users, including attitudes and circumstances behind the process of stating to use snus, and continuing to use it. The authors identified eight categories, and three themes. The results of this study will be useful for the development of strategies to prevent the uptake of snus, and to help adolescents who have already taken up the habit.

The authors have taken up the suggestions of both reviewers, and the manuscript is greatly improved. I enjoyed reading it. There are a number of grammatical issues to address. There are two somewhat more substantive issues (points 4 and 25), but the authors can make their own decision about how they respond to those points. I would recommend that this paper is published as soon as the minor grammatical issues are solved, and the authors have decided what to do about Points 4 and 25.

Minor essential revisions (mostly to do with language – [except for point 4, and point 25 which are important to consider]) and require no further peer-review:

1. Page 2 “The adolescents were unable to interpret . . “ This sentence appears to contradict itself. What about saying something like: “The adolescents were initially unable to interpret the early symptoms of abstinence problems, but subsequently became well aware of being addicted”

2. Page 3 “the use of smokeless tobacco is well spread over the world” – what does this mean? “well spread over the world” is a strange expression. Smokeless tobacco is not prevalent all over the world, it is confined to specific countries, such as Scandinavian countries, the USA, and parts of Africa. Maybe the authors should say that smokeless tobacco use occurs in a number of countries around the world.

3. Page 3. Nicotine is not generally regarded as an unhealthy substance per se. If it were, then nicotine replacement therapy would be dangerous, yet we all
know that the safety of nicotine replacement therapy is well proven. I think what the authors are trying to say is that oral tobacco contains substances such as nitrosamines which are unhealthy, but Swedish snus has very low levels of nitrosamines, while African Toomback has high levels.

4. Page 3. Is the risk of pancreatic cancer reported by Luo et al justified? Luo’s interpretation of data from that cohort has been strongly criticised “Rodu, B. (2007). “Snus and the risk of cancer of the mouth, lung, and pancreas.” Lancet 370(9594): 1207-1208; author reply 1208.” I’m not an expert in this particular point, so I will defer to the authors’ judgement on this matter.

5. Page 3, last line on the page: “TPB demonstrated that the intentions . . “ Can a theory demonstrate something? I thought a theory could only posit something/state something. I thought experimental evidence demonstrated something. Maybe the authors want to say “TPB contends that . . “ ??

6. Page 4, I think the words “of snus use” need to be added to this sentence (see my addition in square brackets): “another factor that complicates the picture of the onset [of snus use] is the development”

7. Page 4. In the sentence “This method was selected for studying . . “ delete “how” and “were”. The method was selected for studying “what” was expressed in the group, not “how” it was expressed.

8. Page 5. “The first author . . . “ delete the words “and had the responsibility” and replace with the word “of”.

9. Page 6. Last line: delete the word “how” from the sentence “. . . illustrated by quotes for each theme to show how the foundation . . “ otherwise the sentence isn’t grammatically correct.

10. Page 9. Add the word “to” (see my addition in square brackets) “. . thought it was sexy with snus and that it suited them [to] be snus users.”

11. Page 9. Replace the word “on” with the word “to” (see my replacement in square brackets) “In general, the boys reacted [to] the fact that . . . “

12. Page 9. “Furthermore, it did not appear very fresh” what does this mean? This is not a use of the word “fresh” that I’m used to in New Zealand or British English. I think in American English it can mean “forward, or cheeky”.

13. Page 10. Replace the word “the” with “their”: “. . but treated [their] friends when . . “

14. Page 11. “. . they wanted to refrains them. . “ does not make sense, “refrains” is not a word. Perhaps replace it with the word “dissuade”

15. Page 11. “. . vomiting, which are passing with . . “ which are passing with” should be replaced with something like “which resolve after”

16. Page 12. “like the friends” should be replaced with “like one’s friends”

17. Page 12. Delete the word “the” from “socialisation of the youth”

18. Page 12. “It is important to imitate .. “ this sentence should be preceded by “Many youth believe that”

19. Page 12. “The adolescents were at an age where” replace “where” with
“when”

20. Page 12. “girls who used snus were not so fresh” what does this mean?

21. Page 12. Preface the sentence “Girls who used snus were seen as unwomanly” with the words “Boys thought that. . .” and later in this sentence replace “it was more accepted that the smoked” with “it was more acceptable if they smoked”

22. Page 13. Add the words in brackets “To start smoking was not [viewed as] an alternative”, and in this same line, make surrounding plural.

23. Page 13. What does this sentence mean, it is not grammatically correct and is confusing “The adolescents had also considered the consequences of their actions . . “

24. Page 15. “The adolescents were unable to interpret the early symptoms of abstinence problems and were well aware . . “ this sentence contradicts itself, this can be corrected by replacing the word “and” with the words in brackets The adolescents were unable to interpret the early symptoms of abstinence problems [but subsequently] were well aware

25. Page 15. “Using snus should not be seen as a more health alternative to smoking”. But snus is more healthy than smoking. I think what the authors want to say is that promoting snus as more healthy than smoking has the unintended consequence of perhaps encouraging youth to use snus who would otherwise never have taken up snus nor taken up smoking.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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