Author's response to reviews

Title: Tobacco Control in the Russian Federation - A Policy Analysis

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Re: Manuscript BMC Public Health, MS: 1885844708786528

Title: Tobacco Control in the Russian Federation: A Policy Analysis

Dear Ms Reyes,
dear Dr. Thomson:

Thank you for your second review of our manuscript submitted to BMC Public Health. We again thank the reviewer for his time and efforts, and we appreciate his helpful and thoughtful feedback on our manuscript.

In the following pages, we address your comment and the reviewer’s concerns, which precede our responses and are in italics, and identify the specific changes in the manuscript based on reviewers’ comments.

Sincerely,

Karsten Lunze
Reviewer’s comments:

Comments reviewer #1:

We thank reviewer 1 for his very constructive criticism, which was very helpful, and have addressed all issues as follows:

Policy context. Third paragraph. Annual spending looks underestimated in view of the annual production in price of 13 Bln USD.

The data we cite reflects the most conservative estimate that was published for 2005, the last year that data was available. We have now included a range of estimates, and specify that other costs (lower wages among smokers) add to the immediate economic costs of tobacco use:

Per capita consumption has reached more than 2200 cigarettes (or 125 packs) per year, and estimations of annual spendings on tobacco products in 2005 range from RUB 83.4 billion (US$ 2.8 billion)[10] to about RUB 180 billion (US$ 6 billion) [15]. The opportunity costs of smoking, or money spent on the purchase of tobacco products that could be spent on other goods, amounted to about 0.9% of Russian GDP in 2009 [2]. Other costs add to the immediate economic loss from smoking. Wage data from Russia, adjusted for potential confounders, show that men who smoke earn about 14.8% less than non-smokers [15].

Health effects
First paragraph. Life expectancy data looks obsolete.

We have updated the data to include recent trends:

While life expectancy in Russian men has recovered from a low of 57 years during the transition to a pre-perestroika level of 64 years today [25], it still far compares unfavorably to their male Western European counterparts with a life expectancy of up to 77 years [26]

General: The need to implement Article 5.3 of the FCTC could be emphasized, as well as the need to counter smuggling from Russia.

We have included a term on the importance of the implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC on the protection of public health policies with respect to tobacco control from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry:

The draft for a new tobacco control bill currently in preparation represents a formidable opportunity to effectively and efficiently reduce the prevalence of tobacco use among the Russian population, in order to counter commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry and decrease the tobacco-related national health and economic burden.

Effect of harmonization of policies within Euroasian Economic Cooperation organization could be further discussed.

The revised manuscript adds a sentence on Russia’s role in the organization and the importance of policy harmonization:
Given Russia’s leadership in the Eurasian Economic Community, policies should be harmonized within the organization.

*The world tobacco control community, including WHO, should consider Russia as a primary target of the industry, with regional and global impact, and act accordingly.*

Following the reviewer’s point, we strengthen our conclusions as follows:

Although Russia has no domestic raw tobacco producers who will be deprived of their livelihood, it represents a global center of attention and interests from transnational tobacco companies; substantial policy resistance will originate primarily from cigarette producers and related marketing and distribution industries.