Reviewer's report

Title: Tobacco smoking, associated risk behaviours, and experience with quitting: a qualitative study with homeless smokers addicted to drugs and alcohol

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Reviewer: Alicja Sieminska

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Title: Tobacco smoking, associated risk behaviours, and experience with quitting: a qualitative study with homeless smokers addicted to drugs and alcohol
Authors: Laura Garner, Elena Ratschen

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This qualitative study with homeless smokers addicted to drugs and alcohol who were accessing a harm reduction service in Nottingham, UK, was conducted to assess their smoking behaviour, associated risk behaviours, and experience with quitting. Data on smoking history, nicotine dependence, motivation and confidence to quit were collected using structured instruments; a semistructured interview guide was used to elicit responses to predefined subject areas, and to encourage the emergence of unprecedented themes. Data were analysed using framework analysis and basic descriptive statistics.

Authors found that participants were generally highly dependent smokers who did not display good knowledge/awareness of smoking related harms and reported to engage in high risk smoking behaviours. The majority reported notable motivation and confidence to quit in the future, despite or indeed for the benefit of addressing other dependencies. Of the many who had tried to quit in the past, all had done so on their own initiative, and several described a lack of support or active discouragement by practitioners to address smoking.

Authors conclude that: “High levels of tobacco dependence and engagement in unique smoking related risk behaviours and social interplays appear to add to the vulnerability of homeless smokers. Given reported motivation, confidence, previous attempts and lack of support to quit, opportunities to address smoking in one of the most disadvantaged groups are currently missed”.

The manuscript is well-written, clearly and sensibly arranged, and easy to follow. In the Background section authors pointed to the fact that while smoking prevalence has been steadily declining in the general population, to currently around 21% in the UK, no decline is to date detectable among some of the most vulnerable groups, including homeless, where the prevalence of smoking has been found to reach up to 96%, with early onset of smoking and heavy dependence being the norm, and comorbid dependency on alcohol and other drugs well recognized. However, smoking and smoking cessation are often overlooked in the homeless population.
Methods used are accurate and sufficiently described. The results are clearly presented (partially in the tables) and discussed on the ground of the relevant literature. Study limitations are pointed out in the manuscript. At the end of the paper well justified conclusions are placed.

In general, the paper adds not so much to the existing knowledge on tobacco smoking in homeless.

However, a notable contrast to findings from an early study can be considered something new: “…while previously a majority of homeless study participants reported to smoke discarded cigarette butts, all of our study participants denied this, stating that even if they picked up discarded butts they always remade them with new cigarette paper. Re-rolling tobacco appeared to be essential for participants and made them feel safer when engaging in what they knew was a risky practice. Concerns over health and transmission of disease in this group were thus apparent”.

I have no major concerns.

Minor concern:

The statement in the Discussion section that “certain parameters, such as knowledge, motivation/confidence to quit, and previous engagement in efforts to give up smoking, and concurrent substance abuse were high compared to the general homeless population, whereas the latter is known to be very high among homeless people [19]” is confusing in the light of further statement of authors (in the “Lack of acknowledgement of health risks” section in the Discussion) that: “Findings that participants appeared to know little about the health risks of smoking contrasted results from another study, according to which homeless smokers had high levels of knowledge about the risks of smoking [7]…..”. The authors should clarify this issue.

**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.