Reviewer's report

Title: Estimating the beginning of the waterpipe epidemic

Version: Date: 26 April 2004

Reviewer: Silvano Gallus

Reviewer's report:

General

This is an interesting, original and well written paper to assess the time period for the beginning of waterpipe smoking in Syria.

The manuscript could be improved providing some minor essential revisions:

-------------------------------------------------------------

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

-------------------------------------------------------------

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1) An explanation of what waterpipe is and which is the difference, if any, between waterpipe and nargile (or hubbly-bubbly, shisha, hookah) is needed.

2) It could be interesting to add in the Introduction section a paragraph citing the (few) papers providing the association between health hazard (in particular cancer risk) and waterpipe smoking. For example: Bedwani R, el-Khwsky F, Renganathan E, Braga C, Abu Seif HH, Abul Azm T, Zaki A, Franceschi S, Boffetta P, La Vecchia C. Epidemiology of bladder cancer in Alexandria, Egypt: tobacco smoking. Int J Cancer. 1997 Sep 26;73(1):64-7.
   This could be important in order to understand the magnitude of this epidemic. Scanty information is in fact available on the association between waterpipe smoking and cancer risk, and it is not obvious to derive the absolute risk of waterpipe smoking from risks of cigarette smoking.

3) I suppose that the café/restaurants giving the possibility to smoke waterpipe have grown over the last two decades, with the increasing of the “fashion”. In this case, it would be understandable that waterpipe smokers increased in the ‘90s. It could be interesting therefore to provide the average number of years since the 17 café/restaurants provided waterpipe smoking.

4) Given the lack of information on the issue, and the rising of popularity throughout the Middle East, it would be remarkable to conclude the manuscript suggesting further epidemiological observational studies on the association between waterpipe smoking and risk of chronic diseases, including cancers and cardiovascular diseases.

5) In the abstract and in the Subjects and Methods section it is written “mean age 30.1+10.2, 161”: substitute with “mean age 30.1, standard deviation 10.2”

-------------------------------------------------------------

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

I would suggest to change the title in “Estimating the beginning of the waterpipe epidemic in Syria”.
**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None