Reviewer's report

Title: Gender and age differences among current smokers in a general population survey

Version: 1 Date: 11 March 2005

Reviewer: Karl-Heinz Jöckel

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper addresses a question of high public health concern for Germany but also for other countries. The authors show a consistently higher proportion of present smokers among female as compared to male ever smokers above the age of 40 in a large cohort. Unfortunately they do not address the proportion of present smokers within age groups, which would give another perspective on the data and the preventable proportion of smokers.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
Although the authors mention the problem of cohort effects in the discussion section they do thoroughly deal with this problem. Female smoking histories in Germany follow different lines than males'. There are completely different social gradients for the different cohorts (by the way 10 years age groups look rather large in light of the huge sample size). Furthermore there is no mentioning of the prewar activities on smoking prevention especially for women during the Nazi regime. The authors should indicate how these factors may have influenced their results, discussing the problem of confounders (including social class) more intensively. Although they mention the high proportion of missing values, there is no indication whether these occur differently with respect to gender. The same applies for the relatively low response rate. Another point that deserves some consideration is the type of sampling. This has been a household survey that overrepresents singles in the sample. Even if this had been corrected for (which is not mentioned), there must be a discussion on whether and how this may influence the results, given the fact that women become older than men. In the last para of the results section the authors deal with ORs as if they were relative risks. This is not correct and should be changed.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
It would be informative to see the differences between males and females (the deltas) in Table 2 and 3

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
**What next?**: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

**Quality of written English**: Acceptable

**Statistical review**: No

**Declaration of competing interests**: 

no competing risks declared