Reviewer’s report

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

Version: Date: 30 March 2005

Reviewer: Rudolf T Hoogenveen

Reviewer’s report:

General

Answer to question 1: Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The question is well defined, but not entirely new. Analyses on smoking prevalence data from cross-sectional studies have been made before. Indeed new is the large sample size, especially for the highest ages.

Answer to question 2: Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The analyses are straightforward. At first descriptive analyses, and then logistic regression. These methods are indeed appropriate.

Answer to question 3: Are the data sound and well controlled?

The several steps of the construction of the data set are well described. Still I have two questions. First, is anything known about the persons with missing data? Second, there are doubts on the validity of answers on smoking status for the highest. E.g., Van de Mheen (1994) has suggested that elderly persons may misclassify their smoking status. Has this been checked?

Answer to question 4: On the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The tables are clear, but I miss the population sample size numbers. Thus, I know the number of current smokers as a proportion of the number of ever smokers and the number of ever smokers, but I do not know the latter number as a proportion of the total population number. In Table 3 part 1 the choice of the age class 10-19 as the reference class does not work well, the absolute values become very small for the highest ages. I was slightly confused, are these odds ratios women compared to men, or age classes compared within gender?

Answer to question 5: On the discussion and conclusions being well balanced and supported by the data.

They are well balanced. The first reason mentioned for the female-male difference did not convince me so far. Until higher ages the mortality selection effect is relatively small compared to the smoking status transition effects, thus I guess the latter effects are more important. Especially in relation to the issue of Age-Period-Cohorts effects, which are the theme of reason two. Here I miss some references to (hopefully available) older data on smoking prevalence rates in Germany. I guess that Germany shows a similar pattern to the Netherlands: during the first decades after World War II almost all men smoked, and women started smoking during the (early?) seventies. Many men have stopped since then, so we see (again in the Netherlands) smoking prevalence rates of men and women converge to each other, the former ‘from above’, the latter ‘from below’. A last question, I thought there were relatively large smoking behavior differences between formerly Western and
Eastern Germany women.

Answer to question 6: On the title and abstract

Title is appropriate, and so is the abstract. I was slightly confused by the phrase â€˜proportion of individuals who maintain smokingâ€™. The cross-sectional data set does not allow one to check this at the individual level.

Answer to question 7: Is the writing acceptable?

Yes, if the questions above has been answered.

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

See my comments above, the paper is acceptable if more attention is given to the aspect of time trends (Age Period Cohort effects).

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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)

Table 3, see my comments above.

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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:

I declare that I have no competing interests