Reviewer's report

Title: Prevalence of and factors associated with asthma in adult male leather tannery workers in Karachi, Pakistan. A cross-sectional study.

Version: 1 Date: 26 July 2006

Reviewer: Paul Cullinan

Reviewer's report:

General
This is a cross-sectional survey of respiratory symptoms among tannery workers in Karachi. It is very nicely written. A prevalence of asthma of 11% is estimated; and of work-related asthma about 5.5%. A number of associations are described; the most interesting of these concerns glove use.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
I think the authors need to be a little clearer about the purpose of their research. I suspect that they are interested in tannery work as an aetiological factor in the development of asthma (I canâ€™t imagine why else they would have done this survey). If I am right then:
1. much of the early part of the introduction - that which refers to the worldwide epidemiology of asthma is unnecessary and could valuably be removed.
2. in its place I would substitute some thing about what is know of the asthma-risks in leather work.
3. the aim needs to be stated clearly and explicitly.
4. without any point of reference the figure of 11% is impossible to interpret.
5. is there any information available that could be sued to generate an internal comparison; say with different tannery tasks or hours of work or some other, indirect measure of exposure (especially perhaps to chromate)? This would strengthen the paper enormously.
6. have the authors considered using work-related asthma as an outcome in their analyses? This may be a more specific outcome than simply â€˜asthmaâ€™.
7. I am unconvinced by the interaction with duration of employment. Why â€˜8â€™ and â€˜13â€™ years? Do these have some particular significance or are they the result of some data dredging?

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
A few minor points:
â€¢ I couldnâ€™t find any reference to ethical committee approval.
â€¢ The distributions of some variables may need to checked. Is income really distributed normally with a standard deviation of 2233 rupees?
â€¢ The numbers for â€˜housing typeâ€™ in Table 1 seem higher than the total surveyed
â€¢ I am confused about the estimated response rate: 40-50% or 50-60%?
â€¢ Some of the terms in Table 2 (â€˜water suckerâ€™, â€˜coverage for healthâ€™) may need explanation.

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 limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests