Reviewer's report

Title: Smoking, cessation and expenditure in low income Chinese: cross-sectional survey

Version: 2 Date: 11 December 2006

Reviewer: Xinguang Chen

Reviewer's report:

General
There is a significant improvement in this revised version of the manuscript comparing to the previous version, including the justification of the study, the definition of the study population, the description of the procedure for sampling and data collection, and the write-up of the manuscript. These improvements enable a better review of other aspects of the paper. I have identified the following key issues based primarily on points the authors put in the Discussion and Conclusions section. I really would like to see that this paper being published because the original data are precious. I hope that the following will be useful for the authors to improve the manuscript. It takes time to prepare a paper like this one that covers three subgroups with a broad arrays of measurements.

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

Methodological issues

1. A critical methodological problem is to compare prevalence rates of tobacco use among three study groups without justifying differences in age composition. Age is known, also seen in this study (Tables 3 and 5) to be related to smoking measures. Among the three groups in the study, the migrants are younger than other two groups (Table 1) and smoking prevalence varied dramatically over age (Table 3). The authors need to address this issue before concluding on differences in smoking among the three groups and on the rejection of their “priori hypothesis” about migrant smoking (page 14). Assistance may be needed from a statistician to address this issue.

2. Related to the precious issue, it will not be valid to compare the findings from this study with those from other reported studies (as seen in the Discussion and Conclusion sections of this paper) without considering differences in the respondent’s age compositions.

Several conclusions are not supported by data:

3. Evidence from this cross-sectional data is not adequate to conclude that “smoking prevalence in low income groups in Eastern China may have peaked” (Abstract and the overall tone in the Discussion and Conclusion sections). In addition, demonstrating the declines in smoking may not strengthen this paper; on the contrary, it distracts the readers from thinking that tobacco control is important among these low income Chinese workers and farmers. Consider dropping.

4. No valid data supporting the conclusion that “The low prevalence of smoking in the under 20 cohort related largely to late uptake” (page 14). Data from this study does not show whether the low prevalence is due to low rate of initiation or slow speed in smoking behavior progression and no supportive data are cited to back this conclusion although data on hazards of smoking onset by age for adolescent Chinese are available.

The phrase “low income Chinese” in the title and many parts of the manuscript is much broader than the population from which the respondents were sampled for this study. Consider revision.

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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)

Minor issues

5. Better to define all variables (smoking behavior, knowledge, income, expenditure on smoking, social and
demographic factors, etc) and their measurement in the Method section. For example, the following should be included in the Method section: (a) categorization of smoking behavior measures, (b) measurement of quitting (Analysis section on page 7), (c) defining attempted quitting with 7-days of nonsmoking (Result section on page 11).

6. Related to the previous issues, better to describe all statistical analyses in the Analysis section, including the computing of a prevalence rate, assessment of expenditures, etc.

7. The statement “… male respondents had quit smoking completely and were no longer smokers” (page 10) is not consistent with the quitters the authors defined (i.e., smoked previously and no long smoking for at least one month, page 8) because no data in this support that smokers quitting for a month will never smoke again and no supportive data are cited.

8. Urban subjects and rural migrants reside in urban area and rural participants reside in rural area but the logistic regression labeled these three groups as three different residential areas and used migrants as the reference residential area (Table 5 and the related text). The term needs to be revised.

9. It is a convention to report p values < .05, <.01 and >.05.

10. There is a great improvement in presenting the data; however smoking behavior measures are still presented in two separated tables (Tables 2 and 4). They should be grouped into one table.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes

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