Author's response to reviews

Title: Tobacco Use Among Students Aged 13-15 Years in Greece: The GYTS Project

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December 4, 2006

Re: MS: 4321657001080701 - Tobacco Use Among Students Aged 13-15 Years in Greece: The GYTS Project

Dear Dr. Phillips,

We are pleased to submit a revised manuscript entitled “Tobacco Use Among Students Aged 13-15 Years in Greece: The GYTS Project” for your consideration.

We have carefully reviewed the editors’ as well as the reviewer’s comments. We have made every effort to revise our manuscript based on your recommendations and we hope that our revised manuscript will succeed in the review process. Below we provide a point-by-point response.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at (+3069) 32264685 or via e-mail. I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Christos Hadjichristodoulou, MD, PhD  
Assistant Professor of Epidemiology  
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Editors’ comments

We would be grateful if you could address the comments in a revised manuscript and provide a cover letter giving a point-by-point response to the concerns. Please also ensure that your revised manuscript conforms to the journal style (http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/ifora/medicine_journals). It is important that your files are correctly formatted.

Response: We would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to revise our manuscript based on the reviewer’s comments. Below we provide our detailed response to the reviewer’s comments. We have also paid attention in order to make our manuscript conform to the journal style. Thank you.

Reviewer’s report

General:
This is a well-written paper aimed at analyzing the prevalence of smoking and of other characteristics of smoking consumption and attitudes among middle-school students in Greece. The results of this descriptive cross-sectional study are of interest to characterize the epidemic of tobacco smoking in Greece, where scarce data have been made available.

Response: Thank you very much for your overall evaluation of our manuscript.

Specific Comments:

Comment 1. The wording of the objective has to be improved both in the Abstract and at the end of the Introduction. They should read equally. The goal of the investigation was not to "analyze the information collected from the GYTS..." but to analyze the prevalence of smoking among middle-school students and to describe the prevalence of different indicators of smoking consumption (such as lifetime cigarette, age of initiation....)

Response: Thank you for the above comment. We have revised both the abstract and the end of the introduction to reflect your recommendation. Below we provide the revised text.

Abstract: Introduction: Data on the prevalence of tobacco use among teenagers in Greece are limited. We examined the prevalence of smoking among middle-school students in Greece in 2005 using the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS).

Introduction: The objective of our current study was to examine the prevalence of smoking among middle-school students and to describe the prevalence of different indicators of smoking consumption using the information collected from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) implemented in Greece in 2005.
Comment 2. Please provide 95% confidence intervals in the Abstract and narrative description of results.

Response: We have done so as suggested. Thank you.

Comment 3. The first half of the 4th paragraph is unnecessary (until ref. 16)

Response: We have deleted the section cited above and modified the text. Thank you.

Comment 4. The authors should discuss in-depth the limitations of their study design: further discussion of the potential selection bias induced by non-response, although low, is necessary. Do the pupils not attending the school or not willing to respond the questionnaire have different characteristics than those who responded? Were all the responses valid? (it is very common to get invalid responses from self-responded questionnaires in young people)

Response: Thank you for the recommendation. We have further discussed the limitations of the study as suggested.

Comment 5. Discussion on the potential information bias due to underreporting of smoking in this population should improve the manuscript. Questionnaires are a valid method to assess tobacco smoking, but a trend to underreporting has been observed in the last decade in some European countries. The anonymous and confidential character of the survey help to improve the quality of responses, but the order have to mention and discuss about it --is this occurring also in Greece?

Response: We have added this limitation in the discussion section as in the previous comment. However, we do not have information to assess whether there was underreporting of smoking among the students in our survey. Below we provide part of the limitations’ section we added based on your recommendation.

A number of limitations of our study need to be acknowledged. First, there was some non-response in our study that may have introduced selection bias if the non responding was associated in any way with smoking. In addition, the possibility of information bias cannot be excluded given that some students may not provide valid answers and also may underreport the level of smoking since the data collected are based on a self-administered questionnaire. Nevertheless, in our study, we reached a student participation rate, which although not perfect, it was sufficient enough to draw significant conclusions on several scientific questions.

Comment 6. Have the questions about environmental tobacco smoke in the questionnaire been validated? Are they also part of the common GYTS questionnaire?

Response: Yes. The GYTS questionnaire has been validated in many different settings and the questions about environmental tobacco smoke are part of the core questionnaire used around the world.
Comment 7. Although the study's primary goal is not to establish comparisons with other countries, the use of the GYTS survey allows to easily establish them. A paragraph comparing the smoking prevalence among pupils with the prevalence rates observed in other European or Mediterranean country, at different stages of the tobacco epidemic, would be of interest.

Response: Although very few European countries have implemented GYTS program, we have made every effort to obtain such data and compared them with our study. We have included the comparison in the discussion section of our study in a new paragraph. Below we copied the added text.

Greece is one of the first European countries to implement the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS). Previous limited reports showed that Greece had one of the highest smoking rates. However, few European countries have implemented GYTS and have reported smoking rates among their middle-school students. For example, GYTS in Hungary in 2003 showed that 33.5% of students report current use of cigarettes, whereas in Slovenia the percentage was 28.5% and in Slovakia the same survey showed that 24.3% were current users of cigarettes as opposed to only 10.4% in Greece. The corresponding rate of current cigarette use in Poland in 2003 was 23.3%, in Romania it was 23.2% and in Albania it was only 12%, which was very similar to Greece. Therefore, the results show that there is a much lower cigarette use among middle-school students in the Balkans as opposed to central Europe.