Author's response to reviews

Title: Prevalence and Main Determinants of Tobacco Use in Cyprus Youth Through the Use of the GYTS

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Author's response to reviews: see over
February 12, 2008

Melissa Norton, MD
Editor-in-Chief
BMC Public Health

Re: Manuscript 1435265355160424

Dear Dr. Norton,

We are pleased to submit a revision of our manuscript “Prevalence and Social Environment of Cigarette Smoking in Cyprus Youth” for your consideration. We would like to thank you and the reviewers for your recommendations and excellent suggestions. We tried to take all comments into consideration and modify the manuscript accordingly; we believe that this revised manuscript is much stronger and hopefully at the high standards of your journal.

Please find below a detailed response, which addresses point by point the referees’ comments.

We would like to thank you very much in advance for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

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Reviewer: Joseph Di Franza

Minor Essential Revisions

Comment: The authors equate the prevalence of needing or wanting to smoke the first thing in the morning with the prevalence of dependence in this sample. The problem is that needing or wanting to smoke first thing in the morning is only one of many symptoms of dependence, and not a particularly early one. This single item is therefore, not a sensitive measure of dependence. It is clear that the actual prevalence of dependence is much higher than is indicated by this single item since so many more of the subjects want to quit. In both the text and table, the authors need to refer to this item as it is and not equate it with the prevalence of dependence.

Response: We changed both the text and the table to ‘admitting to always having or feeling like having a cigarette first thing in the morning’.
Reviewer: Adamson Muula

Major compulsory revisions

Comment: One thing that is not clear throughout the text of the manuscript is whether this study aimed to report on tobacco use (all forms of tobacco such as cigarettes, cigars and pipes, snuff, chewing) or just cigarette smoking or both. Cigarette smoking should be distinguished from overall tobacco use as the former is a subset of the latter.

Response: The GYTS assesses both tobacco use and cigarette smoking, however the latter is done more elaborately and this is the primary focus of our manuscript. We changed the wording in the text accordingly whenever this was considered necessary in order to be more precise and clear.

Minor

Comment: Do the authors feel that a reader will not have any problem in understanding what GYTS is in the title. I suggest perhaps the full term be included in the title.

Response: We decided based on this and another reviewer’s comment to delete GYTS from the title.

Please see abstract:

Comment: In the background, the purpose of the study is to assess the smoking prevalence and the main determinants of tobacco use (is this cigarette smoking or just tobacco smoking?); are these determinants for tobacco use or cigarette smoking?

Response: As mentioned before, the primary focus of the manuscript is cigarette smoking and we changed the wording accordingly when needed to be more clear and precise.

Comment: Also note that when the authors report that they will assess the determinants, strictly this suggest some form of modeling or rather isolating associations (loosely predictors of) smoking. The method used of course identifies the social factors within the environment but have not been linked to smokers i.e. from the report, one cannot say that smokers are more likely to have these attributes compared to non-smokers. This is not to say that the analysis so far done is not useful, but rather may not be described as determinants. I suggest: the social environment in which this smoking or tobacco use is happening. But should the authors conduct regression analysis, then they may probably use the word determinants.

Response: We changed ‘determinants’ to ‘social environment’ as suggested.

Comment: The last sentence of the Methods section (Statistical analyses), the authors refer to p values and 0.05 cut off. There are no results in the manuscript that have made use of this procedure and p values.
Response: Several p-values have been added throughout the text whenever references to statistical comparisons are made.

Comment: The Discussion and conclusion need to be based on the results reported. I will give an example. The authors write: “Based on the above it is clear that smoking, and associated health effects, is a major problem in Cyprus.” While I can agree that the prevalence of smoking is high and is a major problem, I believe the study does not show also that the associated health effects are high in Cyprus.

Response: We removed the phrase ‘and associated health effects’ from the text.

Other comments

Comment: The referencing format/style needs to follow the journal instructions.

Response: We have now changed the referencing style to match the journal’s instructions.

Comment: Para 5 in the background section beginning with: “Limited data”; this para is particularly useful but do not have the relevant supporting references.

Response: Supporting references have been added. (Some of the adult data have now been deleted.)

Comment: In the following para; are the age groups 15 to 18 years and 12 to 15 years overlapping?

Response: They do as some of the older middle school children might be 15 years old as might be some of the younger high school children. We changed the text slightly to avoid the confusion.

Comment: Under Methods section, subsection Population: is the number 40 referring to class size or school size?

Response: It is referring to school size – the phrase ‘a school size of’ is added in the text to clarify that.

Comment: I was wondering whether the authors have some suggestions as to why the smoking rates in females are rising in Cyprus.

Response: Part of the reason is the societal changes from the more traditional Greek family to a more liberate society, the fact that women are gaining more independence and the fact that it is now more acceptable for women to smoke.
Reviewer: Pascal Bovet

Major

Comment: The definition of smoking in youth is not apparent in the paper (usually smoking at least one cigarette during past 4 weeks/month). This definition should appear in the Abstract, in the Methods and each table that mentions “current smoking”.

Response: We included the definition of ‘current smoking’, which is having smoked cigarettes in 1 or more days of the past 30 days, in all abstract, methods, and each of the tables.

Comment: In the results in the abstract, it should be clarified to which extent “tobacco use” represents “use of cigarettes” and/or “use of other tobacco products” by providing corresponding results (in the case of Cyprus most of the consumption seems to come from cigarettes). But it would be useful to mention what is tobacco use not related to cigarettes.

Response: In the abstract the numbers correspond to ‘use of cigarettes’ and it has been now clearly stated. The additional information for ‘tobacco use’ and/or ‘use of other tobacco products’ are mentioned in the text of the main manuscript under the Results section and are clearly stated as well as in Table 1.

Comment: The background section is too long, sometimes too general, and not always referenced. Since the paper is on tobacco use in youth, it is not necessary to summarize effects of tobacco in general or in adults (the two first paragraphs). Instead, the background section should concentrate on current knowledge related to tobacco use in youth (effects on health in youth, evidence for addiction -amount of cigarette smoked to become addicted-, time of tobacco use needed for addiction, factors influencing youth smoking (adults, peers, media), etc). All the background information provided should be appropriately referenced.

Response: The background section has been changed accordingly; it has been shortened and some additional information on youth smoking has been added and referenced accordingly.

Comment: In particular, authors should summarize (in background or in discussion) the available scientific evidence that relates smoking in children (generally defined as smoking at least 1 cig on at least one day per month) with definition in adults (at least 1 cig per day) including references. This information is crucial to provide a valid basis to compare current prevalence of smoking in youth (with definition on smoking on at least one day per month) with prevalence of smoking in adults, i.e. how well the prediction of future adult smoking can be made based on youth smoking (using different definitions in children and adults). For example, it would be useful to provide specific figures on tracking, i.e. what is the proportion of “youth smokers of at least one cigarette per month” that actually will become “adult smokers of at least 1 cig per day”. One might think that quite a few children smoking “one cigarette on one day per month” are experimenters (e.g. smoking a cigarette at a party to look “cool”) but may not necessarily become adult smokers.
Response: Relevant information has been added in the Background section.

Comment: Table 2. It could be useful to provide the results separately for youth who are smokers and youth who are not smokers (i.e. two columns, perhaps a third column for total). Consider making two tables out of this current table 2: one table for factors that are of interest for both smokers and non-smokers (exposed in ETS, media and advertising, etc) and another table for characteristics that are pertinent only for smokers (buy cigarette, cessation). For this new table, perhaps provide information across age categories (smokers of secondary school and smokers of high school). Provide in footnote definition of “current smoker”. Sample sizes could be given (overall, smokers, non-smoker, etc).

Response: We split old Table 2 into two tables – Table 3 and Table 4; Table 3 presents factors that are of interest for both smokers and nonsmokers by current smoking status and is combined with the old Table 3; Table 4 presents characteristics that are pertinent only for smokers by age categories. We further added sample sizes and a definition of ‘current smokers’ as a footnote.

Comment: Figure 1. This figure could be more informative if, for example, two or three categories of smoking intensity were shown (prevalence for youth smoking (for example) at least one cigarette on 1-5 days per month; 6-29 days per month; and every day (or another way of categorizing smoking frequency). If not shown in a figure, this information (prevalence by number of days smoking in a month) would be welcome at some other place (table). Figures on the proportion of smokers (by gender) who smoke at least one cigarette every day would be particularly useful (given by category of age of children), since the study also includes age of 18, which also defines an adult (for whom smoking is defined as smoking at least one cigarette every day). Also provide definition of “current smokers” in footnote or title.

Response: The prevalence per number of days smoking during the last month information is added in a new table (Table 1); a new figure (Figure 1b) presents the proportion of current smokers by gender that smoke at least one cigarette every day. The group of 18 year old students is very small and not considered representative of the population so it is combined with the 17 year old group in a ‘17 or older’ category (similarly for the younger ages).

Minor

Comment: Consider changing title of paper as “Prevalence and main determinants of tobacco use in Cyprus youth” and remove “through the use of the GYTS”, which is a methodological issue. If authors prefer to keep GYTS in title, then spell it in full letters “Global Youth Tobacco Survey”.

Response: The tile has been changed to ‘Prevalence and Social Environment of Cigarette Smoking in Cyprus Youth’.

Comment: Although there is information on tobacco control measures in Cyprus in the paper, it might be better to summarize in one paragraph the information on the main control measures in Cyprus and their implementation: cost of 20 cigarettes packet; law/regulations on advertising
and sponsoring; tobacco promotion practices; size and content of warning on tobacco packets; ban of smoking in public places (secondary school, high schools; restaurants, bars and discotheques as well as rules for minors and availability of vending machines.

Response: A brief summary of tobacco control measures in Cyprus has been added in the discussion section.

Comment: The use of “one in four”, “one in five”, “one in ten”, etc is difficult to grasp for many readers. It would be easier that results are presented systematically as percent. The use of more general quantification could appear occasionally but, then, be on the form of “about half”, “approximately a third of”, “about a quarter of”, etc.

Response: We changed the above mentioned style of presentation to percentages.

Comment: Some details in information in the methods could be dropped (workshop in Denmark, details on sending data to CDC (last paragraph before statistical analyses), etc.

Response: We followed the suggestion and dropped several of these details.

Comment: Statistical analysis, second line. What is meant by “correlation of the data” and was done to take this correlation into account in analysis? (while information weights to account for sampling is clearly described).

Response: We deleted the phrase ‘correlation of the data’ which is not needed.

Comment: Around 8% of secondary school students and 10% of high school students did not participate. It would be useful to comment on this fairly high non participation of students: absent on day of survey? refusal? if refusal do we know some of the reasons? Also, can authors comment on expected effect on overall results (for example see: Journal of School Health 2006;76:133-7).

Response: The non-participation of students was due mainly to being absent on the day of the survey rather than refusal and as such we do not feel that it would affect the overall results of the study.

Comment: Cessation (page 10): definition of “dependant” should appear in the “methods section” (as well as definition of “current smoking”).

Response: We added the definition of current smoking in the Methods section and instead of using the word ‘dependent’ which as pointed out by another reviewer is not entirely correct we used ‘admitted to always having or feel like having a cigarette first thing in the morning’.

Comment: Discussion. Some reference is made on “influence by fashion magazines” (first paragraph). It would be interesting to know if the comment is general or local, i.e. such magazines are read frequently by youth in Cyprus and if these magazines are made in Cyprus for
Cyprus, if there are local magazine that target youth (and in local language), and if these journals include advertising for tobacco.

**Response:** The comment is more general but, similar to elsewhere, magazines (in both English and the local language (Greek)) that include advertising for tobacco are being read regularly by youth in Cyprus.

**Comment:** As mentioned above, a paragraph would be needed to make the link between youth smoking and adults smoking, e.g. how one can, based on best scientific evidence, anticipate trends in adults based on data in youth (knowing that definitions are different in youth and adults and based on available tracking data that do not equate fully youth and adult smoking).

**Response:** Relevant information has been added in the Background section.

**Comment:** Table 1. Provide age (mean and range) for both middle school and high school students in table. Provide definition or “current smoking” as a footnote of table. Sample sizes could be given (overall, boys, girls, etc).

**Response:** The definition of ‘current smoking’ is added as a footnote; sample sizes are given as well as mean age (sd).

**Comment:** Table 3. Provide in footnote the definition of “current smoker” and provide sample sizes (overall, current smokers, non-smokers). (Each table should be self explanatory with respect to the terms used and the sample sizes).

**Response:** The definition of ‘current smoking’ is added as a footnote and sample sizes are added.