Reviewer's report

Title: Key health promotion factors among male members of staff at a higher educational institution: a cross-sectional postal survey

Version: 1 Date: 27 June 2007

Reviewer: Chris Metcalfe

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript describes the results of a cross-sectional study of health-related behaviours among male employees of a UK university. The manuscript is clearly written, although there are a number of minor grammatical errors throughout. The major weakness of the study is the very low response rate, which is unlikely to have resulted in a representative sample. However, different age groups and a range of occupational groups are represented in the final results, and hence information on the range of behaviour if not the frequency of those behaviours is available. I hope the authors find the following comments useful, all of which can be considered minor essential or discretionary revisions.

[1] Page 6, first paragraph
Could a copy of the questionnaire be included as an appendix?

[2] Page 7, first paragraph
Can the exact mean and the exact median be given?

[3] Page 7, first paragraph
The key demographic etc information only needs to be presented in Table 1. No need to repeat it in Tables 2 and 4. In fact I would keep Table 1 just for this information and start a new table for smoking. Note that in Table 1 the number of Single / Separated / Divorced men is incorrect.

[4] Page 7, smoking, first paragraph
At present Table 1 includes column percentages for the current smoker, ex-smoker and non-smoker columns. In fact row percentages would be more useful, and it is these that are discussed in the text. Single, separated and divorced men are combined into a single row in the Table, but these should be separated into single men and separated + divorced men, as is done in the text. Similarly support technical and manual occupational groups should be presented separately in the Table, as they are discussed separately in the text.

[5] Pages 7 to 8, smoking, second, third and fourth paragraphs
The number of current smokers is low (n=47), so the statistics presented for this group should give numbers of men as well as percentages. Otherwise the percentages give the impression of having more data than is the case.
In addition, it isn’t always clear where the percentages have come from. For example “…the proportion of medium smokers (54.5%) and heavy smokers (46.7%) was higher in manual jobs …”. To me this implies 0% light smoking in manual jobs. Giving the numbers would make this clearer.

The chi-square test for manual versus non-manual jobs has 18 degrees of freedom – implying that the more detailed division of occupations is being considered in this test. Worth pointing this out to the reader? The F-test comparing the ages of men who would like to quit versus those who do not want to change has 2, 44 degrees of freedom, implying 3 not two groups are being compared. I’m not clear what the third group is.

[6] Page 8, smoking, last paragraph
“Fulfilling the Scottish national recommended level of physical activity (OR 2.2) and being single (OR 0.3) were associated with not smoking”. Is the latter correct? The odds ratio is in the opposite direction to that for physical activity, and the result is in the opposite direction to that quoted a couple of paragraphs earlier.

[7] Page 9, drinking
The distinction between “consumed alcohol” and “have not consumed alcohol” in Table 2 is not useful, and isn’t used in the text. Worth including categories in the table which are also used in the text?

[8] Page 10, second paragraph
“Single / divorced or separated men had more units of alcohol a week than those married or living with a partner …”. How the associated 1 degree of freedom test has been calculated is unclear to me.

[9] Page 10, third paragraph
This paragraph needs to be moved to the methods. The resulting data has already been described by the time we get to this paragraph.

[10] Page 11, physical activity, first and second paragraphs
These two paragraphs are slight variations of one another – choose just one to present.

It looks very odd to have and odds ratio of 1.00 for age, when it is stated to be the major factor associated with physical activity. Worth presenting the OR for a five year rather than a one year increase in age?

[12] Discussion and conclusions
It appears that most of the cohort know that they could be behaving in a way more beneficial to their health, but still smoke and binge drink. The benefits of health education in this cohort are questionable. I suspect effective interventions will have to be a bit more novel than those suggested here.
Acknowledgements
Was any funding received for this study?

Figure 1
Add confidence intervals. No need to join the means – with age banded it is no longer a continuous scale.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

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