Reviewer's report

Title: Prevalence and determinants of tobacco use amongst junior collegiates in twin cities of western Nepal: A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based survey

Version: 1 Date: 25 October 2007

Reviewer: Rob Mcgee

Reviewer's report:

General

Overall, I think this is a well-written paper presenting important information on smoking among junior college students in Nepal. The justification for the study is well-made. The review of the existing literature on smoking in developing countries is appropriate.

The methods used in collecting the survey data are well-described and appropriately chosen. The data are "up-to-the-minute" providing a current snapshot of smoking which can be used to advocate for appropriate policy change and perhaps provision of quit services at the college level. The discussion sets out the needed policy changes that might help address smoking in Nepal.

The issue of student knowledge is an important one. Even if providing knowledge of the dangers of smoking doesn't necessarily stop students from smoking, I think there is a strong case that people have a right to know the health risks associated with consumer products they are using. I think there is a case to be made for health education about smoking.

The response rate is excellent and gives a high degree of confidence to the findings.

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

I think there is one major change that the authors need to make to the analysis of the results which is critical. The sampling frame for the survey relies in the first instance on classes in colleges. Consequently the initial sampling units are clusters of individuals, not individual students. That means that the data are "multi-level" and this needs to be accounted for in the prevalence estimates and other analyses. This is because it might be expected that participants from the same college would be more alike than participants from different colleges. My understanding from talking to a biostatistician here is that SPSS does have the facility to allow for such a multi-level analysis. It may well be that such an analysis will not markedly change the results. However, it is possible that some
significant findings may change when these "dependencies" among the data are accounted for.

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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)

I could not quite follow the scoring procedure for the measure of assets. Each of 7 items attracted a score from 5 to 40. Its not clear how the actual score was arrived at; the range of scores does suggest that it is not simply the presence or absence of the asset. The maximum score is 180 if all 7 items were present; this should be 280? This score needs just a bit more description.

Young daily smokers in Western countries would usually report smoking more than 3 or 4 cigarettes a day as reported in this study (see section on "Smoking pattern and access to tobacco products"). Is this an unusual finding? It would suggest that perhaps many of these daily smokers are not dependent. Also, do the students use either cigarettes or chewable tobacco products, or do the smokers tend to use chewable tobacco too. Table 1 seems to suggest that latter is the case. What are the harms associated with chewable tobacco? A brief mention might be appropriate: are they cancers of the mouth throat etc.?

There are a few minor changes that need to be made eg. data were coded (first line of data analysis section).

Otherwise nothing major that I can see.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'