Author's response to reviews

Title: Fagerstrom Test for Nicotine Dependence vs Heavy Smoking Index in a general population survey.

Authors:

Monica Perez-Rios (monica.perez.rios@usc.es)
Maria Isolina Santiago-Pérez (monica.perez.rios@usc.es)
Begona Alonso (monica.perez.rios@usc.es)
Alberto Malvar (monica.perez.rios@usc.es)
Xurxo Hervada (monica.perez.rios@usc.es)
Jose de Leon (monica.perez.rios@usc.es)

Version: 3 Date: 28 October 2009

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for your response and also for the extra time allowed for the review. We have corrected the manuscript following the recommendations made by both reviewers, and in our opinion the quality of the paper has been improved. You will find below a point-by-point reply to the concerns raised by both reviewers.

Please note that we have not included a statement on the study approval by an Ethics Committee since this was not necessary because the patients were anonymous and the main objective was to characterise tobacco consumption on Galician population for health planning by the Health Authority.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Mónica Pérez-Ríos

Reviewer: Jean-Francois Etter
Reviewer's report:

HSI and FTND are old measures that are already well documented, and this paper does not add much to the literature.

We only agree with the reviewer’s commentary that “HSI and FTND are old measures” if it is referred that they have been proposed some years ago. There are new tests that have been proposed quite recently such as the Glover-Nilson test, the HONC checklist or the Cigarette dependence scale. Nevertheless, the HSI and FTND tests continue to be a referent when nicotine dependence is analysed as is confirmed by recent publications, some of them in high impact journals:

- Hudmon et al (Addictive Behaviors, 2005): These authors utilized the FTQ and the FTND in a sample of ex-smokers.
- John et al (European Journal of Public Health, 2005): The authors included the FTND.
- Nakazawa et al (BMC Public Health, 2004): The authors utilized the FTND in a sample of Japanese male smokers.

We agree with the reviewer in that both tests are well documented, but we do not want to know the performance of each individual test. Our objective is to compare the performance of both tests when applied in a population obtained after a stratified random sampling highlighting the gender influence on the results. There is only one study with a similar objective published by Chabrol et
al but the interview method was different from ours (face to face versus telephone survey). Moreover, our study had a higher sample, guaranteeing better estimations when gender is taken into consideration.

Finally we disagree with the last commentary “this paper does not add much to the literature” because this paper is the first published (to our knowledge) trying to compare HSI and FTND in a representative population sample by sex, applying the questionnaire by telephone.
Reviewer: David S. Timberlake
Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revision

Introduction

1) The authors need to make a stronger argument in the introduction for another replication study of the validity of HSI. In addressing the objective of their study, the authors should first establish the original rationale for utilizing the abbreviated version of the FTND (reference #2; Heatherton (1989)). One argument for their analysis, as they noted subsequent to the introduction, is that most studies have not examined the measures of validity by gender. This is the one consideration which distinguishes their results from other studies.

We agree with the reviewer commentary and we have included this argument in the introduction in the second paragraph and in the objective. It is now as follows:

"The HSI’s usefulness in assessing nicotine dependence in general population surveys aimed at health planning has not yet been completely established. Furthermore, most studies have not examined the measures of validity of HSI versus FTND test by gender in general population. The main goal of the present study was to estimate the agreement between the HSI compared with the FTND in a representative population sample with special attention to gender differences."

The main rationale of having an abbreviated version of the FTND test had been already included (first paragraph):"... Therefore a time saving test was developed, the Heavy Smoking Index (HSI) derived from the FTND [2]...”.

Results

2) A more thorough examination of the FTND items by gender would be useful in explaining the discrepancy in sensitivity between the male and female smokers. One suggestion is to modify Table 1 to make it more informative. The authors might consider adding additional columns corresponding to the percentage of males and females who responded to the various FTND/HSI categories.

We agree with the reviewer’s commentary, and following the recommendation we have included a new figure on the results section describing the percentage of males and females who responded to the various FTND/HSI categories. In our opinion including this figure is more informative for the readership than modifying table 1. Below is the new figure.
Figure 1.- Percentage of males and females who responded to the various FTND/HSI categories

Discretionary Revision
Methods
3) Briefly describe or list the measures of tobacco use that were ascertained in the survey.

*We agree with the commentary and we have included the information required:*

“...The participants were asked about smoking history, tobacco labours consumption, dependence, relapse or cessation motivation. They were also asked if they were current (daily or occasional), former or never smokers. Demographic and socio-cultural information were also ascertained...”

Discussion
4) The authors should consider briefly discussing the limitation of using the FTND as the gold standard. A number of recent publications have compared the FTND with other measures of nicotine dependence. This discussion will provide the
reader with the broader context of the ND measures, and where the FTND fits in this context.

Following the referee’s comment we have included the following sentences in the first paragraph of the discussion:

“…and therefore this result supports the use of the FTND instead of HSI. Nevertheless it should be acknowledged that using FTND as the gold standard has some limitations. FTND does not cover different aspects of dependence such as the difficulties in controlling tobacco consumption or unsuccessful efforts to quit.”

5) I am undecided if Table 3 should be placed in the discussion. On the one hand, it does provide a convenient summary for the reader to compare results. One alternative is to move the table to the introduction, once again emphasizing that the current study is only one of two which examined the measures of validity by gender.

We were also initially undecided on the placing of the table. We finally decided to put it in the discussion, since this section should reflect how we can interpret our results and compare them with the results of other research.