Reviewer's report

Title: Smoking and asthma in young people: evidence from postal questionnaire surveys in the Wythenshawe Community Asthma Project (WYCAP).

Version: 2 Date: 11 April 2006

Reviewer: David Mannino

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors look at 2 years worth of questionnaire data to determine the relation between current, former, and never smoking and "asthma". The definition of asthma used is somewhat novel, it that it required at least four positive responses to 6 questions of respiratory symptoms or history of allergies/asthma. While this is reported to be "validated" based on citation 23, from the same group, in that paper patients were not actually seen and evaluated, but physicians were asked to determine whether their constellation of symptoms merited "a trial of obstructive airways disease medication". It is important to note that lung function was never measured, nor was asthma or COPD diagnosed in these subjects. The authors find that current smokers report more symptoms that suggest the presence of chronic respiratory disease (assumed to be asthma because the population was limited to people 45 and younger)

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

Table 1 should be changed to a more standard one that lists (in rows) age categories, Sex, smoking status and ETS exposure and in the column proportion in each subgroup with "asthma"

Table 2 can be combined with Table 3, as the lowest line.

For both Tables 2/3 - the author should eliminate the lines with current smokers as the reference group- this is way too confusing.

The conclusion in the paper (p 9) is much more reasonable than the conclusion in the abstract, which overstates the findings. My conclusion of the analysis is that current smokers have more respiratory symptoms that suggests a need for respiratory medication. I would change the conclusion in the abstract to that noted on p. 9.

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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)

OR's for chest tightness for smokers are missing.

The title should be changed to reflect that these are respiratory symptoms and not asthma, per se.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
The authors should consider adding another table that lists mean and median number respiratory symptoms by smoking status (or smoking and gender, as women tend to report more symptoms than men).

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory 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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests