Author's response to reviews

Title: A CRITIQUE OF the WHO TobReg s (*) Advisory Note Report entitled: Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking: Health Effects, Research Needs and Recommended Actions by Regulators (Tobacco Free Initiative, 2005) (*) WHO Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Olsen,

I have revised the manuscript by taking into account each of the reviewers’ comments and conforming to the style of your journal as you invited me to do. Please find below how I answered them, one by one, knowing that I am uploading, apart from the revised manuscript, a copy of it where the modifications are highlighted in yellow colour. The name of the file is "highlighted_Revisions_Chaouachi.doc".

Yours sincerely,
Kamal Chaouachi

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS REQUESTED BY REVIEWER 1

>> Reviewer 1 suggested to avoid sentences and wordings like "We are afraid....Just to give an example,..." and, instead, adopt a more neutral formulation.

This has been done.

>> 1.1.-Origins. "It is said (page 1) that, according to Chattopadhyay, that "waterpipes....centuries". The quotation is not accurate, because this author does not...Moreover...., up till now we do not have any proof of Indian origin of hookah use. The more ancient traces were found in Southern or Eastern Africa. For instance, bowls of waterpipes..."

This has been done and the whole paragraph was changed accordingly.

>> 1.2.-State of research. The author should not belittle his work through false modesty. I think he should say something like : "It is is true that very little research has been devoted to the subject. Therefore to perform an exhaustive bibliography was not a superhuman task, and the WHO report should have done it. I personally regret that the authors did not even mention the deep and early health oriented anthropological research that I carried on in this field, which contains many ideas for the desired development of prevention and cessation strategies" (3, 5, 6, 13, 19, 20). These documents have been widely advertised, over the years 2000-2005, among the international community of tobacco control researchers and activists, particularly through the Globalink network. English abstracts, translations and comments of their findings were widely disseminated.

This has been done and the whole paragraph was changed accordingly.
>> The last two paragraphs of the conclusion should be suppressed. The author does not have to justify himself for giving the references that have been forgotten in the WHO report. He is entitled to do so. But regarding this report, to insinuate that their omission was intentional and the result of an international conspiracy might be regarded as offending.

This has been done and the two paragraphs were deleted.

>> 1.3.-Tar Yield. The sentence "and volume" might be reformulated, as quotations refer to author’s works only, such as: "So we had the possibility to clarify this point by stressing the importance of parameters such as the puffing frequency and volume and others (id.)."

This has been done and the sentence was changed accordingly.

REVIEWER 2’s MAJOR COMMENTS:

>> about "several expressions such as "anyway", "so on", "so", "we did it", "better said", "clearing up", "not so minor", "we are all the more surprised" [that ] must be avoided."

This has been done and all these words and similar expressions were changed accordingly.

>>” Furthermore, the aim of the article is not clearly stated in the introduction."

I changed the introduction and included the background of the research and its aim. I named it “Background” in order to conform to the journal style.

>> "Finally, conclusions are too lon, especially the first part”.

Reviewer 2 actually refers to the 2 same paragraphs Reviewer 1 wanted to be suppressed. This has been done.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS REQUESTED BY REVIEWER 1

>> “The style could be more condensed. Some sentences could be suppressed, or simplified without altering the meaning.”

This has been done. Please refer to the file where the modifications are highlighted for each detail.

>> 2.1.- Origins. For instance, "After the residues...error margin(3,4)" could be summarized : "C14 datation situated their use around years 1320 ± 80 ".

I do not understand the conclusion of this chapter "Consequently, it is not worth...way of smoking". I do not see the relationship between a possible Indian origin and the safety of this way of smoking. The idea should be either clarified, or this sentence suppressed.
I changed the paragraph as suggested by Reviewer 1.

I clarified the obscure sentence by putting: “For the authors of the report, the myth of the hookah as a safer way of smoking is as old as its invention in India. However, there is no point in insisting on the necessity of this Indian origin because it is also a myth itself.”

>> 2.2.-Tar Yield. The sentence "The question here...these figures" might be suppressed

This is done.

>> "§2, line 4: "The discrepancies in results are striking: the two former found a reduction by c. 50% of the tar...". Reduction relative to what?"

I clarified the statement by adding: "(smoke compared with that produced by a narghile with no water inside)"

>> "§3, first sentence. The parameters that could change the amount and nature of the substances absorbed by the smoker might be better specified :"...certain substances, volume of the bowl, amount and temperature of the water, added substances, length of the aspiration tube and so on...""

This has been done thanks to the following formulation:

"Moreover, there are also other important parameters that could change the amount and nature of the substances absorbed by the smoker: aspiration speed, pressure, water solubility of certain substances, volume of bowl, amount and temperature of water, added substances, length of the aspiration hose and others..."

>> "2.3.-Heating and Burning. "§1 "It contains glycerol....foil" might be simplified by suppressing "...and one of the functions of the latter is..."."

This has been done.

>> "Moreover...qualities" The author should be more specific in explaining why knowing the crude amount of tar is useless, because its harmful components, i.e. nitrosamines, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, represent a very variable and anyway small percentage of the total weight, which therefore is in no way a valuable index of its hazards. This is true for cigarette smoke, so that one should stop printing on cigarette packs the smoking machine tar yield, which gives the smoker a fallacious information about the real danger. This is even more true for narghile smoking, which is much more variable.

I reformulated the whole paragraph as suggested:

On the other, knowing the crude amount of tar is useless, because its harmful components, i.e. nitrosamines, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, represent a very variable and, in any case, small percentage of the total weight, which therefore is in no way a valuable index of its hazards. This is true for cigarette smoke, so that one should stop printing on cigarette packs the smoking machine tar yield, which gives the smoker a fallacious information about the real danger. This is even more true for narghile smoking, which is much more variable.
2.4.-Women. The WHO report is very imprecise. It says "...in some countries...", but does not tell which ones. Thus the discussion is aimless, except to say that in other countries the women behaviour differs.”

I clarified the idea because the point here is generalisation, the main problem with the methodological approach of the authors of the report, in this document and in their other studies as well. The idea that the hookah is the same in all countries, that the smoked products are the same, that the puff volumes are the same, that there is a strong contrast between women and men, etc. is wrong. We have seen how complex it is, particularly with the discussion about the tar yields, the smoking behaviour, etc.

Some researchers who are not familiar with smoking patterns in Asian and African societies may understand that hookah smoking, from a sexual viewpoint, is more or less the same in the Middle East. This is not true. I clarified the comment:

“This may be true in some countries but wrong in others. For instance, in Tunisia and Libya, cigarette smoking is still a male domain but “water-pipe” also. In these conditions, generalisation should be avoided because there is no “rule” in this field and this issue needs further comparativist anthropological research that already began for a decade now [15][19].”

3.- Discretionary revisions I think such abbreviations as a/m (above mentioned? ante meridiem?) which occurs twice should be avoided.”

All of theme were changed.

MINOR COMMENTS BY REVIEWER 2

1. The abstract should be more structured, and clearly explain the content of the manuscript and state the conclusion. Now it looks more like an introduction.”

I changed the abstract accordingly and also included the background and aims, results and conclusions sections in order to conform to the journal style.

2. The references are not formatted according to the style of JNRBM

The style of the references in the text and the list of it have been changed accordingly.

3. References cannot be reported as “14a” or “16a”; they should be changed to 15 and 17, respectively.”

This has been changed.

4. Pag 6, line 15: change “suggests and” to “suggests to””

This has been changed.

5. Page 7, line 5: the author states that “This argument is not consistent at all”, what is the reason?”

It is not consistent because the hookah epidemic in the Middle East began long before the recent emergence of the Arabic satellite TV channels. Consequently, it is wrong to present a “scenario” for the epidemic based on a common sense quick analysis. Narghile
use is very complex and the many reasons (about 15) are detailed in the thesis not cited in the WHO report. I reformulated the corresponding paragraph.

6. “Page 9, line 3 from bottom and line 10 from bottom: these statements cannot stay as they are; the author should either clearly explain these reasons or (better) delete these sentences”
Reviewer 2 actually refers to the 2 same paragraphs Reviewer 1 wanted to be suppressed. This has been done.

>>” 7. Page 10: Delete statement starting with “if we are wrong” and change to “we are open for discussion” or something similar”
This has been done. The 2 paragraphs have been suppressed (see above).

”>>”8. Reference n.20 is not published and cannot be quoted”
This has been done.

>> ”9. Reference n.36 is unclear, the author should list to which references he is referring to”
This has been done. References pointed to are now 22 and 29 (both by Salem)