Reviewer's report

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

Version: Date: 21 August 2006

Reviewer number: 1

Reviewer's report:

1.- Major compulsory revisions
The feeling of frustration felt by the author is quite understandable, after his major contribution as a pioneer in the field of scientific approach of narghile smoking has been ignored in such an official report. However, this feeling has to be played down, in his own interest.

1.1.- Origins
Sentences "We are afraid….Just to give an example,…". A more neutral formulation would be more acceptable, such as:
"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…"

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.

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.

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.)."

2.- Minor Essential Revision
The style could be more condensed. Some sentences could be suppressed, or simplified without altering the meaning.

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.

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

§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..."
2.3.- Heating and Burning

§1 "It contains glycerol….foil" might be simplified by suppressing "...and one of the functions of the latter is...".

"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.

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.

3.- Discretionary revisions

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

CONCLUSION

I think the manuscript should be accepted after the author has responded to the major compulsory revisions.

Level of interest

I am not familiar with the politics of the Journal. Stricto sensu, it does not relate negative results. However, it severely criticizes an official text, in a field of growing interest, where it seems important that an official truth does not permanently settle down without being questioned. I would class this paper as important in this field.

Quality of written English

The language is quite clear and understandable. Sometimes sentences are unnecessary lengthy and complex. But, as English is not my mother language, I am not entitled to judge its quality.

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