Reviewer’s report

Title: Russia-specific relative risks and their effects on the estimated alcohol-attributable burden of disease

Version: 4
Date: 27 March 2015
Reviewer: David Leon

Reviewer’s report:

This revised paper is a real improvement on the original. The authors have satisfactorily addressed many of my comments by making substantive changes to the description of methods and the discussion. However the paper still has a number of important problems referred to in my review that have not been addressed. These mainly concern the sources of data and their quality and the face validity of the results. In addition, the methods section remains relatively opaque, although better than in the previous version.

1. The revised paper still lacks a table showing the estimated distribution of consumption in the Russian population and a point estimate of average per capita consumption based on this. In addition, the prevalence of Heavy Episodic Drinking employed is not provided. Without this I think that the paper’s face validity is severely compromised, not least because the estimation of this crucial set of parameters involves a modelling procedure that is novel and unfamiliar to most readers.

2. Confidence in the estimation of alcohol consumption in the paper has in fact been slightly undermined by the authors now providing additional references to several Russia sources of consumption data. The first is ref #37 to Perlman. This paper is based on the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS) which has been heavily criticised by Nemtsov (a leading expert on alcohol consumption in Russia) for producing very substantial underestimates of volume as well as pattern of hazardous drinking.(1;2) The second is ref #38 – which is to a Rosstat Central Statistics Database. There are many, many such databases, and this reference would not enable a reader to track down the data itself.

3. In my previous review I stated that I am sceptical about the DALY estimates. Although the authors have now inserted a cautionary note in the Discussion (line 305) about the general problematic data of morbidity data everywhere, there is no explicit statement about the almost complete absence of reliable morbidity data for Russia as a whole. Of course this paper cannot be expected to mount a full scale defence of GBD estimates of morbidity in Russia. Because of this my view is that either the authors should drop DALYs entirely (which would not be a loss as the primary focus is on RR mortality estimates), or they should make a much stronger statement about the very provisional and uncertain nature of the DALY estimates for Russia.


**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