Reviewer's report

Title: A quantitative content analysis of UK newsprint coverage of children's exposure to second-hand smoke and legislation targeting smoking in vehicles carrying children

Version: 2  Date: 5 June 2015

Reviewer: Patricia McDaniel

Reviewer's report:

1. Major compulsory revisions

Given the important role that the media play in influencing public and policymaker opinion on a range of tobacco issues, the topic of this paper is timely. However, I think the paper could be both streamlined and fleshed out so that it is more focused and informative. There appears to be some tension in the paper between discussing media coverage of children's exposure to secondhand smoke (SHS) in general, and focusing more narrowly on media coverage of children's exposure to SHS in cars. The paper seems clearly more interested in the latter, so it might make sense to focus on that topic, thereby eliminating the sections in the Results that focus on “representations of the roles of adults” and “other legislation and solutions.” This would free up space to provide some examples from your newspaper articles of the various themes related to smoking in cars with children present, which would make the article more interesting to readers.

Specific suggestions:

Abstract: The first sentence on media influence doesn’t quite summarize agenda setting and framing theories (plus it is grammatically awkward). The media doesn’t influence how issues are presented; instead, the media presentation of issues influences how the public perceives those issues, and the importance the public attaches to them. Also, in the abstract and throughout the paper you need to clarify whether legislation regarding SHS in private vehicles only concerns instances when children are present. The final sentence of the abstract comes as a surprise, given that there is no mention of this in the results.

What is already known on this subject: It would be useful to add something about children in the first few sentences, given that it is your focus. For example, presumably the legislation you mention concerns children as passengers in cars.

What this study adds?: Legislation about what? Successful votes about what? Explain.

Background: The introduction should be reorganized and tightened. I recommend starting with line 86 (the first half of the sentence that spans lines 86-89), and then explaining why. Then you could move on to the current state of legislative
affairs in the UK and Scottish parliaments, explaining what it means for a bill to be lodged in the Scottish parliament, and giving an example of the “strong indications that political will favors legislative solutions?” (Is something hindering such action?) Then you can move on to mass media. Your descriptions of agenda setting and framing are somewhat unclear; I don’t think a reader new to these ideas would really understand them. For example, what does it mean to “imbue an issue with salience?” I also recommend keeping your sections on framing together rather than breaking them up, and deleting lines 121-124

Methods: What are the readership profiles of the various types of newspapers (briefly)? Clarify the smoking in cars aspect of the amendment (line 142). How did you decide if article focused “predominantly” on children and SHS? Did it have to contain a certain number of sentences, etc.? Can you give an example of “initial coding frame structure derived from existing literature on smoking issues?”

Results: Explain the significance of an article appearing on the front page; what does it mean in terms of agenda setting/framing?

Lines 210-211: My count of the number of tabloid articles, based on information in table 1, is 136, not 134. Similarly, my count of middle market tabloid articles is 97, not 90.

Line 216-219: Table 2 suggests that the count of articles discussing harms posed to children by SHS exposure is 116, not 160.

Line 297: Is there some inference to be made about the fact that middle market tabloids covered the topic of SHS in vehicles more than other genres of newspapers?

Lines 311-313: Did you code newspaper articles for quotes/comments from public health advocates? How do you know that public health advocates engaged in media advocacy on this topic?

You should make some connection in the discussion to your point in the introduction about the construction of affected groups, with the vulnerability of children as something almost impossible to argue against. Do you think that the media focused on supportive arguments for legislation governing smoking in cars with children present because of the vulnerable children aspect? This is where it would be useful to have some examples from your results section to draw upon – what kind of arguments pro and con were presented in the media? Did the vulnerability of children come up in arguments against the legislation?

2. Minor essential revisions

Lines 202-203: Identify the genre of the two UK publications not represented in the sample.

Lines 228-230: Since you put percentages in parentheses in lines 229-230, you should do the same with your 2/3 and (n=68) figures.

Line 237: Clarify that the call for a ban on smoking in vehicles concerned cars in
which children were passengers.


Table 1: Include the full label for “middle-market tabloid.”

Table 2: Change “Mentions arguments for legislation against SHS in cars” to something more clear – like “Mentions arguments opposing legislation prohibiting smoking in cars while children are present.” Do something similar for “mentions arguments for legislation on SHS in cars” so that it is clear you are talking about legislation protecting children as passengers.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.