Reviewer’s report

Title: Who calls the shots in tobacco control policy? Policy monopolies of pro and anti-tobacco interest groups across six European countries.

Version: 1 Date: 07 Jan 2019

Reviewer: Rachel Brown

Reviewer's report:

There are two different titles on the draft - needs correcting.

I have significant concern over the publication of a paper containing quotes for a study that does not have ethical approval from an institutional ethics board and can't recommend it at this time without amendment to the ethics process. Given that ethical approval wasn't obtained it would have been beneficial to go back to participants with the final draft to confirm that use of quotes was acceptable and to state this in the draft. Furthermore, while participant identities are protected by reducing descriptions to generic terms like 'member of parliament' or 'civil servant' this is also actually problematic as it doesn't allow for assessment of the relative expertise or positioning of that participant to speak on this subject with authority because it's quite vague.

Abstract

The phrase 'policy dominance' is unclear and would benefit from elaboration to set up the rest of the paper. Does it refer to being the dominant influence in the policy making process?

Conclusion. Page 2, line 49 capital T needed on 'the'.

Main text:

Page 3, line 12 should be 700,000.

The section could be clearer in explaining that supranational and national policy actions are not necessarily either/or as it reads at the moment. The role of government is not just developing local policy but also implementing supranational measures, for example advertising restrictions which are now part of the EU Tobacco Products Directive rather than developed by individual member states. The interaction of governments with supranational bodies could be elaborated on here.
The next section on the role of interest groups reads well however paragraph 2, page 4 is a little sparse on detail of why a cross-national approach may be preferred. More information is needed here on what this adds over the depth of data obtained in single case studies.

Methods

The description of participant responses is good however information on stakeholders is limited and doesn't provide enough detail on their involvement in tobacco policy. This makes it difficult to assess their level of expertise. I appreciate that this is to ensure anonymity but it is then hard for the reader to know why they were selected and how equipped they are to contribute.

Paragraph 1 states that the larger study was conducted in six countries but then states that the SILNE-R project covers seven countries. I would recommend that the sentence be clarified.

Page 6, line 52 - states that quotes were anonymized as much as possible to ensure confidentiality. Does this refer to only using job titles or does it mean that quotes were edited? It'd be helpful to explain more about how the data was treated here, particularly in light of the absence of ethical approval for the study.

Analysis - The choice of framework methods is appropriate to the study aims and the analysis process is well-described.

Results

The identified themes are appropriate and well-chosen and provide clear illustrations of the different positions taken across the selected countries. The Background section suggests that the display ban is the main focal point of the comparative analysis but it actually reads as just one of many themes in Results. It should be less prominent in Background to manage expectations of the amount of discussion on it later.

Page 12, line 16 - should read 'a type of income'

Discussion

The discussion of the framing of tobacco within the countries is well-written and interesting and the framing of tobacco policy within the larger political processes of a country is very useful. It would be helpful to provide a little more detail on the legislative framework for tobacco in place in each country at the moment to provide context e.g. adoption or otherwise of the type of
measures discussed in Background. It would also be helpful to outline tobacco use rates and costs in each country (probably within Background). This is important to consider why countries may have taken variable paths in terms of policy. There is a ‘which came first?’ element to the discussion, which isn't addressed here and probably needs to be considered through a timeline of tobacco control within each country. For example, how does a strong NGO community take hold in the first place? What is it about the policy context that allows that to happen? This would add significantly to understanding why the current picture looks as it does.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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