Author’s response to reviews

Title: Prevalence, distribution and social determinants of tobacco use in 30 Sub-Saharan African Countries

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor

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On behalf of our authors’ team, I first thank the journal for further considering our manuscript for publication in BMC Medicine. Reviewer #2 had further comments about his earlier suggestions. We have addressed those comments in the R2 version. Moreover, during the interim period, latest data (2013/14) became available for Congo Democratic Republic. Earlier DHS in Congo DR (2007), tobacco use data for men was not collected. We included new data that became available after R1 version of the manuscript was submitted to BMC Medicine.

We included revised number in tables 1 & 2 with updated analysis of revised pooled data, and re-categorized the age groups according to reviewer-2, Giovino’s suggestion. In effect, numbers in tables 3 & 4 changed almost entirely.

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Comments 1-6 below are major compulsory revisions:

1. Regarding comment #1: The authors continue to misrepresent GATS, by claiming that it does not report SLT use separately (citing reference 19). GATS reports smokeless separately in the 2012 Lancet paper (Giovino et al.) and on the GATS website.

Reply: We apologize for overlooking this once again. We have removed the statement “do not report SLT use separately” along with reference to GATS publication.

2. Regarding comment 2: your edit is still wrong. FCTC = Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

Reply: There were two instances were FCTC was wrongly spelled out. We have rectified both places.

3. Regarding comment 3: Your analysis of males aged 40 and over is imprecise. You should create a category that is 40-49 and report the data for all nations and then, for countries that have data for people older than age 49 create a variable entitled 50+.

Reply: For most countries men aged >50 years were surveyed. The same has been included in men’s age categories now along with updated data (for Congo DR, 2013/14 survey)

4. Regarding comment 7: the authors prioritize the criterion of consistency over the criterion of accuracy. In science, accuracy should come first and the verbiage can then be re-crafted to keep things consistent. For males, your Odds Ratios do not reflect "times higher" they reflect odds that are X times higher. The verbiage is incorrect as currently written.

Reply: We referred to literature and accept this suggestion to be accurate and consistent. We have revised all interpretations in the entire paragraph and highlighted it instead of track changes. Rephrased interpretation will read as "When compared to respondents aged 15-19 years, the odds to being a smoker and SLT user was 5-8-fold greater for those aged 40-49 years (>50 years for men)".
5. Regarding comment 8: the "15-49(64)" in the Methods section of the abstract needs to be fixed accordingly, given the need for re-analysis indicated in comment 3 above.

Reply: The suggested correction has been made in abstract.

6. Regarding comment 20: you cannot discern from one cross-sectional study if you have an age effect (i.e., people continued to initiate as they go older) or a cohort effect (i.e., smoking was less likely to be initiated in more recent decades).

Reply: Previous literature have reported about cohort effect, and agree that both cohort effect and age effect should be assessed from repeated cross-sectional surveys.

Some literature we came across are given here

7. Regarding comment 21: There are dozens if not hundreds of studies on smoking as an appetite suppressant. In addition to those, here are two citations that might be helpful: Peter Boyle and his colleagues describe an effect on page 248 in Tobacco: science, Policy, and Public Health (2010) (see:
http://books.google.com/books?id=zoinrErcdncC&pg=PA248&lpg=PA248&dq=suppression+of+hunger+as+a+reason+to+use+tobacco&source=bl&ots=6xjjQUxFaB&sig=GJc5CiOSyJyiS8a1z9waVuti4k&hl=en&sa=X&ei=kUQsVI_0B9atyASH4YCGAw&ved=0CEAQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=suppression%20of%20hunger%20as%20reason%20to%20use%20tobacco&f=false.

There is another on how the tobacco industry added appetite suppressants to cigarettes at:
http://eurpub.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2011/04/07/eurpub.ckr023.full.pdf+html

Reply:

We thank the reviewer for sharing the references. We have included the following text along with the two important citations.

"It has been thought that poorer people may consume tobacco to suppress their hunger. Many smokers believe that smoking has an appetite-suppressing effect which has been exploited tobacco companies by adding appetite suppressant molecules into the cigarettes."