

Peer Review

Review of: "Prevalence and Patterns of Tobacco and Nicotine Product Use in Italy: Findings from 2018–2024 Repeated Cross-Sectional Surveys"

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The rise of smoke-free alternatives needs further research into their use among smokers who intend to continue nicotine consumption, ensuring physicians are adequately equipped to manage these subjects clinically. This represents the main added value of this study, which provides data from the latest in a five-year series of cross-sectional surveys conducted on the Italian population—both general and HTP users.

Despite the industry-funded nature of this research, the data are presented with commendable balance. The methodology is well aligned with the survey's scope, producing a robust dataset that fills a notable knowledge gap concerning the behaviour of smokers transitioning to smoke-free products in Italy. Given the scarcity of local data, these findings offer valuable insights and may help clarify ongoing debates regarding adult smokers in the region.

When interpreting the study results, it should be noted that the researchers employed two distinct sampling streams: a representative General Adult Population Sample (GAPS, N≈3,700) and a targeted THS User Sample (TUS, N≈1,000). The three-stage stratified random sampling used for the GAPS ensures the data reflect the 2019 Italian Census population through RIM weighting. However, a potential for selection bias in the TUS cannot be excluded, as it is drawn from a database of registered PMI users who consented to research participation. This limitation is partly mitigated by the fact that 95% of THS users in Italy are registered, and the authors themselves acknowledge that a cross-sectional design cannot demonstrate causal “switching” behaviours but only correlations. Finally, it should be considered that the data rely on self-reporting, which may be affected by recall and social desirability biases.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.