

Review of: "Barriers to quitting smoking – a survey among 1000 adult cigarette smokers in Germany"

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The manuscript titled „Barriers to quitting smoking – a survey among 1000 adult cigarette smokers in Germany“ describes very hot topic of possible barriers in quitting smoking in population with high stable smoking prevalence. However I recommend addressing several major revisions before acceptance for publication.

Minor revision:

Title:

The article deals with personal barriers rather than general ones, so I recommend changing the title to e.g. "Personal barriers to quitting smoking..."

Major revisions:

Introduction:

The 1st paragraph:

In the sentence "The overall long-term abstinence rate of smokers attempting to...", please add information that this success rate is for unassisted attempts.

The 2nd paragraph:

Please write "less harmful" instead of "better" in this sentence: "Switching to better alternatives presupposes ..."

Please rewrite the first sentence:

EC and HTP stand elsewhere on the risk continuum for tobacco and nicotine products. A 2018 Public Health England report includes evidence that indicates HTPs may be safer than traditional cigarettes, but less safe than e-cigarettes (1). Unlike EC (2, 3), there is insufficient evidence on the effectiveness of HTPs on quitting smoking (4, 5) and the evidence is insufficient on whether HTPs could significantly reduce the risk of tobacco-related diseases (5, 6, 7, 8, 9). Independent studies cannot confirm that HTP aerosol is indeed less harmful to health compared to CC smoke and e-cigarette aerosol even if reduced exposure to some harmful and potentially harmful constituents of HTP aerosol was detected (6, 7, 8, 10). IQOS use may result in increased tobacco consumption or dual-use with cigarettes (11). Consequently, HTPs should not be the first option to decrease smoking-associated harm (12).

The last paragraph:

Please, replace the paragraph on the study aims "While the DEBRA-study provides..." over the paragraph "While behavioral therapy combined..."

The sentence "While behavioral therapy combined with pharmacotherapy is one approved measure to assist smokers in quitting..." needs to be rewritten. What citation do you refer for this claim: "...smoke-free alternatives for adult smokers who do not quit smoking cigarettes altogether..."? It looks like it is not necessary to quit smoking completely. Please rewrite it to make it clear that the goal of quitting smoking is a total abstinence from combustible tobacco products.

Methodology:

- Please explain in the text your decision for exclusion criteria for participation in the study.
- What was definition of a serious quit attempt? Please complete this information to Methodology.
- Please provide all Original Survey Questions e.g. in Supplements.
- What do you know about your participants with regards to their level of tobacco dependence or intensity of CC? Please state it in Methodology and in Demographics of the study population or if not available in Limits of the study.
- Please explain in the text why you left out question No 5, which was more general and might give an opportunity to respond to patients who have no time schedule.
- Please complete what statistical methods were used. If statistical significances of results were not determined, please indicate this in Limits of the study.

Results:

Please provide only numerical results or use verbal evaluations only in comparison to something. The verbal evaluation of the type "low" belongs to the Discussion. I mean concretely the first sentence posted that "...the overall motivation to quit ...is low...". The same goes for the title of Figure 1. Fifty four percentages is more accurate to call "more than half" or "narrow majority" than "the majority". Please rewrite it.

Please move the paragraph "Our results are in line with previous research..." to Discussion.

Please rewrite the section about so called discouraged smokers so that only the facts are presented. Assumptions about this group of participants (and its naming) belong in the Discussion as well as the term "learned failure". Do you have a citation to support the use of this term? What does mean "familiarity with NRTs"? Please provide the original question.

The sentence with reference No 17 belongs to Discussion, please move it.

Please explain why you did not merge answers "Enjoyment of tobacco/enjoy/likes the taste/tasted good" with the most frequently cited barrier which you marked as "enjoyment of smoking".

Figure 4: There is probably a type error in answer "I belong to me". Probably it should be "It belongs to me."

Please provide only results without commentaries in the paragraph "Nicotine replacement therapies and consumption alternatives to cigarettes". Please comment results only in the Discussion. The same goes for the paragraph "Little knowledge about the

relative harmfulness of nicotine” and “Smoke-free products as an alternative to continued smoking”. Please rewrite it.

The sentences with reference No 18-25 belong to Discussion, please move it.

Figure 8: You should differentiate the answers “Don’t know” and “No answer”. Btw did all participants answer all question?

Discussion:

Please add a paragraph about possible explanations why smoking prevalence in Germany has remained unchanged for the last five years - how is implantation of MPOWER points doing into practice in Germany?

Please provide appropriate reference supported your assumptions to the paragraph about “discouraged smokers”.

Higher desire to reduce cigarette consumption in the middle-aged and older smokers may be read as misunderstanding of importance of the total abstinence from CC. Please comment this in the text.

The paragraph “When guideline-based methods to quit smoking...” and the last paragraph “In summary...” need to be rewritten according to actual guidelines - it is not possible to mix nicotine alternatives (EC, nicotine pouches) with tobacco alternatives (heated tobacco products). It is necessary to distinguish the risk continuum, please see the quotation above.

Please state Limits of your study.

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