Asthma prevalence among adults in Saudi Arabia

To the Editor

I have read with great interest the article published in the Saudi Medical Journal by Al Ghobain et al.,1 reporting asthma prevalence in Saudi adult population.

I agree with authors that asthma prevalence is under-reported among Saudi population. However, I believe robust study designs are needed to report one of the most common chronic diseases in Saudi Arabia.2 This study offers great data about the prevalence of asthma. However, I consider that there are some key practical aspects to take into account that might be essential for reporting the data for this paper considering the limitation of cross-sectional design.

The authors were the first to use the European Community Respiratory Health Survey (ECRHS) questionnaire on Saudi adult population; however, failed to detail their validation steps and processes. Moreover, the paper lacked to add the translated version as a supplemental material. It is very crucial to clinical researchers in this paper to understand that translating any questionnaire from other languages does not mean it can be validated and use for the studied population.3 European Community Respiratory Health Survey must be first validated in Arabic as an instrument to assess outcomes in asthma population in Saudi Arabia before measuring asthma prevalence in this population in order to be confident that it is a representative data.3 Such violation in methodological terms leads to measurement errors, and conclusions drawn are presented with less confidence.3

Other methodological concern that authors did not report enough data about the studied population for instance income level, employment status, smoking history, family history and most important other illness that might be linked to some of the reported symptoms. Table 1 show the mean of age is 29 for male and 26 for female which reflects that the majority of studied subjects are below 30 of age for both genders, no standard deviation was reported in the table. Other interesting aspect that about the data collection is that the sample size was almost equally collected for genders, 52.4% and 47.6% respectively. It looks that the sampling technique used was convenient sampling or bias in the presenting the sample.

The authors stated in the first paragraph of the discussion that nasal allergies and smoking tobacco products were investigated; however, these measures were not presented in the aims of the study. This may raise concerns about the data quality and chances of data contamination.

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Reply from the Author

No reply was received from the Author.

References

3. Dowrick AS, Wootten AC. Murphy DG, Costello AJ. “We Used a Validated Questionnaire”: What Does This Mean and Is It an Accurate Statement in Urologic Research? Urology 2015; 85: 1304-1310.