Reviewer's report

Title: A review of equity issues in quantitative studies on health inequalities: the case of asthma in adults

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Reviewer: Elizabeth Harris

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Discretionary revisions only

This is a very well written and elegantly structured piece of research. It addresses the important issue of the way in which quantitative studies look at equity when they observe differences (inequality) in their findings.

The methods are well described and could be applied to other conditions. It was interesting to note that while no authors used the words equity/inequity, all but one traced at least a partial pathway to inequity. I was surprised that about half proposed some intervention but not surprised that these mainly had a clinical focus.

For those with an interest in this area the differences between inequity and inequality are well explained but it may be worth making the point that when in the course of describing differences in outcomes related to age, gender, class or race in the interpretations of their findings authors are also making values based decisions on whether these differences are unfair or unjust. This study is important in highlighting that these decisions are often implied rather than stated.

While it would be expected that those studying asthma would seek clinical interventions as important it provides an opportunity for those teaching epidemiological methods to expose their students to wider, socially based set of possible distal causal mechanisms.

An important contribution to understanding how epidemiological papers could contribute to better understandings of inequity.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'