Reviewer's report

Title: The importance of social support in the associations between psychological distress and somatic health problems and socio-economic factors among older adults living at home: A cross sectional study

Version: 3 Date: 13 January 2012

Reviewer: Philayrath Phongsavan

Reviewer's report:

I am happy with how the authors have addressed the issues raised in my initial review. However, I further recommend that the authors consider the following points/suggestions in the next iteration of the manuscript:

1. page3, para 2 - re the phrase ‘self-related health’, do the authors mean ‘self-rated health’?

2. page3, para 2, last sentence – some qualification of the sentence ‘Health also shows a social gradient [5]’ would improve clarity of the concept that the authors are trying to convey, eg., that the lower the socio-economic position the more self-rated health, mental health etc is affected, or put another way health generally improves with higher socio-economic economic status etc.

3. page3, para 3, first sentence – the phrase ‘lower adequacy of social support’ is ambiguous. Do the authors mean quality or level (frequency or number of contacts) of social support?

4. page3, para 3 – the sentence ‘There are two alternative causal models, the direct effect....’ Suggest qualifying the first clause ‘There are two alternative causal models [of what?]....’

5. page4, para 2, last sentence – suggest that the location for this sentence ‘We wanted to explore whether social support...’ is better placed somewhere before your statements of the hypotheses [page 5, para 1]

6. page4, last para – replace ‘Psychological distress gives...’ with ‘Psychological distress results in...’

7. page5, para 1 – suggest new paragraph with following sentence or similar ‘The objective of the present study...’

8. page5, Methods, para 1 – insert the word ‘years’ after ‘77’ and ‘76’.

9. page5, Methods, para 2 - replace ‘...therefore excluded from the material’ with ‘...therefore excluded from the sample’.

10. page5, Methods, para 2 – replace the word ‘forms’ with ‘questionnaires’.
11. page 5, Methods, para 2, second last sentence – replace ‘material’ with ‘analysis’.
12. page 5, Methods, para 3, replace ‘...distribution of the data...’ with ‘...distribution of the study population [or sample]...’
13. page 6, Variables, para 1 – ‘Data was...’ should be ‘Data were...’
14. page 6, Psychological distress, first sentence – delete phrase ‘mental health’ from sentence ‘The indicator of mental health [delete], psychological distress was...’
15. page 6, Psychological distress, last sentence – suggest rephrasing to ‘The HSCL-10 is recommended for screening purposes because this scale represents the best compromise between economy and accuracy in identifying ‘distressed’ and ‘non-distressed’ groups in the general population’.
16. Tables 2 and 4 and where appropriate, replace ‘Demographics’ with ‘Socio-demographics’ [or ‘socio-economics variables’] to be consistent with the usage of this term in the body of the manuscript and the title; it also reflects better the cluster of variables covered under this term.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.