Reviewer’s report

Title: Educational Aspirations add to the Social Reproduction of Health Inequalities in Adolescents.

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Reviewer: Leena Koivusilta

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The article enters the important issue of the origins of health inequality. Factors influencing the pathways through which young people navigate towards their educational levels are crucial for the creation of health inequality. In this article some of these factors have been dealt with in a fresh manner. The article has relevance also for researchers in educational studies, because it introduces factors used mainly in public health or health psychology, such as sense of coherence and social support.

To my opinion, the article is suitable for publication in BMC Public Health. However, I suggest some amendments to be made before the publication. My comments are as follow.

Major compulsory revisions

Abstract: Already in the methods paragraph, a short mention about the types of educational tracks should be given. Without it, it’s difficult to orient towards the main message of research.

Introduction: On page 5, in addition to the article by Macintyre & Hunt, also a more original reference to the theory of health selection should be given for those readers, who have not entered into the crux of health inequality discourse. It could be, for example, the very Black Report (Towndsend & Davidson 1982).

Methods: The absolute number of the respondents together with their age range should be given. Also, in the first paragraph, it is not clear what is meant by the type of school; this should be described.

Results: A recommended practice for presenting the results of statistical and epidemiological analyses should be used. For example, p values less than .001 should be expressed as p<.001 (or p<.0001).

Results: On page 10 and afterwards, the expression “main model” should be replaced by a more descriptive one to indicate that it is the model fitted in the whole material.

Results: In the paragraph following Table 1, the expression “probably due to a lesser impact” is rather vague. This result is not discussed later and thus it needs an interpretation either here or in the discussion.
Discussion: The dimensions of the sense of coherence should be discussed a little bit more. The Chronbach’s alphas were not very high for most of the scales. Were there some items which didn’t work well on the scale? Could something have been omitted? On page 11, the interpretations of these dimensions should be discussed.

Discussion: The role of the parents’ education in the creation of educational careers of their children has been largely studied, but could this research add to deepening the interpretation of the role of this “capital”?

Discussion: The results about the affordability of study are interesting but remain without further contemplation. This aspect of educational aspirations has not been excessively studied and thus, it would be necessary to discuss the findings presented on page 10 and also their significance for educational careers. What does this question indeed measure and is the format of asking it precise enough? How have the respondents understood the question? These things could be discussed as well.

Minor essential revisions

Methods: On page 7, the reference number is mentioned twice.

Results: In the paragraph following Table 1, after the words “…. had a significant effect”, the dependent variable should be added “…. had a significant effect on educational aspirations”.

Discussion: On page 13, in the last paragraph, the clause should be completed. For example, “…. usually a good measure of several aspects of health…..”. What is health, anyway.

Discussion: On page 15, the word “undesirable” is used. I shun using these kinds of value-laden expressions in scientific reporting.

Conclusions: I find the expression “….and such conditions ………absorbing it.” rather confusing. Perhaps there is also another reader, to whom it doesn’t open easily. I think that the problem is that the expression “such conditions” does not refer to any previous expression. Then, in the next clause, the expression “those who need education the most” leads me again to think about the values underlying the research and also to cultural factors which could perhaps not be captured by this kind of methodology. I understand the logic between the ideal of “the highest possible qualifications for everyone” (on page 13) and the results of this study. I agree that everything which puts obstacles to reaching this goal is undesirable. Yet, perhaps those who have taken vocational education, indeed have got all the education they need in the social context in which they live. Well, these are my reflections only.

**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.