Reviewer’s report

Title: Establishing a follow-up of the Swiss MONICA participants (1984-1993): Record linkage with census and mortality data

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Reviewer: Giampaoli Simona

Reviewer’s report:

The study aims to assess the feasibility of an anonymous record linkage between the MONICA survey data, the census and the Swiss National Cohort (SNC) in order to demonstrate the validity of the follow-up mortality. Results are compared to those of routine data from different sources of information (life tables and official mortality). The authors sustain this method for retrospective cohort studies and cross-sectional surveys when mortality follow-up could not be provided for confidentiality reasons.

Comments
- Background: objectives are clear and well described;
- Methods: please add some information to the methods of the MONICA at baseline in order to highlight the importance to collect mortality follow-up and assess the prediction of risk factors such as: (end of first paragraph under methods): “Weight and height, blood pressure and blood lipids were measured following standardized procedures and methods of the MONICA Project; they have been described in details in previous publications [ ]”;
- MONICA survey data cover age-range 25+ , so include only comments of this age range (first paragraph under SNC data, aged 24-29 instead 10-29);
- the description of the record linkage between MONICA and SNC step by step is not clear, please describe better how was performed; please include also MONICA III cohort;
- statistical methods are appropriate;
- Results: are well described;
- Discussion and conclusions: explain the limits of the study and discuss future opportunities: possibility to link only all cause mortality, no record linkage of hospital discharge diagnosis, no validation of identified events; the method offers the possibility to identify events, not to validate them, which is the expensive and time consuming part of the cohort studies. Validation is essential to answer etiological questions; the method described is not an alternative to cohort studies. Moreover this represent a good method to use the Swiss National Cohort, but could not be applied in other countries. For the future a standard consent is needed, common for all Europe in order to be able to follow the population during life reducing the confidentiality problems due to the mortality and morbidity follow-up.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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