Reviewer’s report

Title: Prevalence of Disability among Elderly People in Spain: A Screening Survey based on the International Classification of Functioning

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Reviewer: Maria Victoria Zunzunegui

Reviewer’s report:

General comment:
Good descriptive paper. This could be an important contribution to the literature on using the ICF model to analyze disability. This paper constitutes an application to identify service needs among older people in Spain.

However, gender and regional differences may be of importance in identifying populations with high prevalence of disability in Spain. We recommend that the data be re-analyzed to increase understanding of the geographic and gender distribution of disability in this sample of older people.

Abstract:
Change sentence in results section of the abstract: “Sex variations were minimal”, since sex prevalence rates are very different according to domain and age groups. Particularly, severe mobility disability (GAR) is more frequent in women than in men and the prevalence ratio is more than double among the 85 years and over. Same is true for severe Life activities disability. And these two domains have the highest prevalence for every age group.

Introduction:
The authors state: “The ICF system may provide a more comprehensive framework to disability…” but this is not clear from the current introduction.

The use of ICF to measure disability in the older population has been previously criticized. The advantages of using the ICF classification instead of the more commonly used Activities of Daily Living and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living is controversial. Advantages of ICF should be more clearly stated. For example, are there ICF advantages related to planning for services to cover unmet needs of disabled people? Are there any advantages of ICF related to research on physical and mental function in old age?

Methods:
Please change wording in text and graphics from “Negative WHO-DAS II” to “score of zero in WHO DAS II”.

Was non–computable DAS 36 associated significantly with cognitive impairment?

According to table 1, the study sample has little education. It is well known that the MMSE has a strong education bias with high proportions of false positives among those with less than high school education. Is the MMSE an appropriate
screening tool for this population?

Results:

Two thirds of the sample are living in populations with less than 10000 inhabitants. Is this representative of the population of older people in Spain?

Seventy per cent of those in the 85 years old group are women. Is this representative of the very old population in Spain? In that case, a sex-specific analysis of the data may be important for planning of services. In addition, age-adjusted and raw prevalence rates are not very different (See figures). However, sex differences seem to be quite important. We would suggest the authors to replace current figures with figures showing sex-specific age adjusted prevalence of disability in each domain.

Samples are coming from areas of Spain with large differences in the level of education of the elderly population (For instance, Galicia and Catalonia). Could sex-specific age adjusted prevalence of disability be given by region and could an ecologic association be drawn between education and disability prevalence? Geographic variation may help identify populations in regions with high needs of services.

Discussion:

In the first sentence of the discussion (This study is the first population-based survey reporting disability prevalence assessed according to the ICF framework), do the authors refer to studies in Spain, studies on the older population or both?

Please state: .....390,000 individuals older than 75....

Some sensitivity analyses could be done to evaluate the underestimation of disability due to lack of complete data among those with dementia. In fact this does not seem to be a large source of bias. There are 7 out of 48 dementia cases (15% of dementia cases) with incomplete data for WHO DAS. Is the percentage of incomplete data among those without dementia 36/394=9%?

A comment of the rural composition of the study sample and their possible higher prevalence of dementia compared with urban populations, could be added to the discussion.

Are there any further conclusions related to potential policy implications?

Should findings be confirmed in populations living in large cities since these results are based on a mostly rural sample?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests