Reviewer's report

Title: Health-damaging behaviours on both sides of the Hungarian-Romanian border: a cross-sectional study

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Reviewer: David Doku

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Health-damaging behaviours on both sides of the Hungarian-Romanian border: a cross-sectional study

The authors studied the socio-demographic condition, nutritional status and lifestyle of the Hungarian and Romanian people living in the same region by the border, and to reveal their relations. The study was well thought and adds to knowledge in inequalities in health behaviour in such a demographical context. The conclusion reached is important for public health intervention in the border settlement in the region.

Here are some comments:

Abstract:

If space would allow add some figures of the main (e.g. odd ratios) results in the abstract.

Introduction:

The introduction lacks a snap shot of previous Hungarian and Romanian studies on inequalities in health behaviours. The only specific background presented on these two countries is their life expectancies.

Page 4, paragraphs 2 and 3. Disease and life expectancy is featured prominently here as if it is the main aim of the study while a concise review of previous studies on socioeconomic differences in health behaviours, and a building up of the rationale for the study is lacking.

Page 5, paragraph 3 “In Romania, a large proportion of the population remains either below the poverty level or vulnerable to becoming so. Some groups (e.g. the Roma populations) are especially disadvantaged.” Give precise figure of the poverty level (if available)…and what is the poverty level in Hungary?

Page 5 last paragraph “The data of this survey are intended to serve as a basis for recommendations of public health authorities in Hungary and Romania – especially in the region nearby the border – in formulating area-specific preventive measures.” I think the use of “,” is better than “–“. You could check the
language fluency too.

In general, the introduction lacks a solid argument for the rationale of the study.

Methods:

Page 6, paragraph 2. “When choosing our sample, the population of six settlements was involved from one small administrational region on both sides of the border (Table 1).” This is not clear. How were the six settlement sampled?

How was the sampling done to arrive at the representativeness in terms of age and gender as stated?

Readers would be interested in knowing how health behaviours and the socio-demographic indicators were assessed. In information provided in the methods is more of how the variables were categorised rather than how they were assessed. E.g. who were classified as never smokers, ex-smokers or current smokers? What does it mean by “pursue sports competitively”, etc?

Move the fist paragraph on page 8 “The study protocol was approved by…” to the end of the first sentence of paragraph 3, which begins with “The survey was based in interviewer-administrated…” on page 6.

Results:

Page 8, first paragraph of the results. …”the rate of those who have primary education and are in better financial conditions was significantly higher among the Romanians than the Hungarians.” This sentence is confusing. Clarify.

Last sentence of paragraph two. “The condition of the Romanians was also worse in terms of smoking habits and the origin of fat used for cooking.”. Reconsider this sentence. Consider using phrases like “the prevalence of ….was higher among …than…” Or “…were more likely to than….”

Last sentence on page 8. “…75.2% of the Romanians ate in an unhealthy way”. They did not eat in an “unhealthy way”. They ate unhealthy diet. The authors must check the wording of the sentences throughout the manuscript, especially in the results.

Page 10, first paragraph. “In the Romanians, unhealthy nutrition was strongly influenced by age (OR=1.02),…” I wouldn’t call an odds ratio of 1.02 “strongly influence…”, no matter how strong the p-value. An odds ratio of 1 simply means no difference.

Discussion:

First sentence. “The results of our study show that the Hungarian and the Romanian groups had similar age and gender composition, but were different both in terms of socioeconomic conditions and health behaviours.” This conflicts with the conclusion in the abstract, “The results pointed out to the fact that the
socioeconomic condition of a person has been associated with health behaviour and lifestyle both among Hungarian and Romanian people living by the border.”

Page 10, last sentence of first paragraph under discussion. “… certain behaviours…” The name the behaviours specifically.

The last paragraph of the discussion, page 12. Again disease and mortality is prominent here as if it is the main theme.

In the discussion, a reflection of the present findings in the light of previous Romanian or Hungarians studies is lacking. A number of inequalities in health behaviours studies have been conducted in these populations.

The authors should discuss the self-report and cross-sectional nature of the study as well as other weaknesses that may affect the interpretation of the results.

Tables:

Table 3. What is the purpose of the correlation analysis in this table?

**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