Reviewer's report

Title: A simple measure with complex determinants: investigation of the correlates of self-rated health in older adults from three continents

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Reviewer: Nathalie Burkert

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The authors wrote a very interesting article in which they analysed self-rated health (SRH) in over 25000 older adults from 4 different countries, and correlates of SRH with socioeconomic, lifestyle and health indicators. The results of this article contribute towards a broader understanding of self-rated health, as well as cultural differences in this variable. The manuscript is well-written and is worth publishing. I have just some minor comments which can be dealt with easily in a revision.

Keywords:
Order of keywords should be changed (e.g. self-rated health, older adults, Australia, Japan, South Korea, United States of America)

Introduction:
The introduction is written very precisely and gives an overview about the current findings concerning SRH and its association with various variables. Overall one can get an accurate view about the background concerning cultural differences in SRH, and influences on its evaluation. Gender effects in SRH are described below the headline “Aims of the study”. Concerning that, background literature should be reorganized in a way that an additional headline should be added to report these findings.

Methods:
Sample: Information regarding the proportion of females and males should be added here (the authors only write that in Australia “the proportion of females was very high”. Also a reference to table 1 should be added.

Material and data harmonization: This part can be reduced, e.g. the exact questions concerning alcohol consumption in the different countries are not necessary. It would be sufficient to write “frequency and quantity of drinking was available”. The same goes for the item asking for SRH.

Results:
Correlates of SRH: “They showed that Australia differed from all other countries”. In what way? It would be better to say In Australia SRH is evaluated significantly better than in all other countries.

Cross-national differences in SRH: Since gender differences are reported here
Discussion:
The authors say that the most striking finding is that SRH correlates with medical conditions, poor mental health and functional limitations. This supports the assumption that SRH is a good indicator of health.!!
The most interesting finding for me is that Koreans report worse health than older adults in the other countries. This result is interpreted by historical, and financial influences, as well as labour force participation. Since data of adults age 45 and older exist for Korea, it would be interesting to analyse the data of younger Koreans to substantiate this interpretation.

Tables:
A table with information regarding gender differences in SRH would be interesting.

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.