Reviewer’s report

Title: Gaps in Indigenous disadvantage not closing: A census cohort study of social determinants of health in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand from 1981-2006

Version: 1 Date: 2 December 2013

Reviewer: Joseph Kaholokula

Reviewer’s report:


Francis Mitrou, Martin Cooke, David Lawrence, David Povah, Elena Mobilia, Eric Guimond and Stephen R Zubrick BMC Public Health Research article

Reviewer’s comments

The findings of this study are very important to improving the health of indigenous populations in developed countries. It suggest that very little improvements have been made in “closing the gap” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations on three key social determinants of health (i.e., income, education, and employment) in three countries (i.e., Australia, New Zealand, and Canada) with policies in place since the 70’s aimed at closing the gap. It further suggests that new strategies are needed to effectively close the gap which targets early education. This study has implications for other countries such as the U.S. Below are specific recommendations I have to strengthen the presentation of this important study. They are all minor essential revisions.

Introduction:

1) On page 4, 1st paragraph: could the acronym OECD be spelled out here (Organizations for Economic Co-Operation and Development) as it is the first time mentioned.

2) On page 4, 2nd paragraph, 1st sentence: What “period” are the authors referring to? I assume it is the period between 1970s and now, but it should be restated (e.g., …over the last four decades) in this new paragraph.

3) Although social determinants of health are the underlying framework for this study, there is really no explanation/definition of social determinants of health in the introduction, and how income, employment, and education are key components. Could the authors provide a short paragraph to explain more about social determinants of health and how income, education, and employment are related to physical and mental health outcomes, especially in Indigenous populations?

Methods:
1) Although not too important, would it be possible to break the sample down by gender by country just for information in the methods section. I am wondering how balanced was the gender between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous samples.

2) Could the authors provide more details about the measures used, such as examples of the response options as presented to the respondents?

3) I am not entirely clear of how the employment categories were determined. Perhaps in addressing my previous question will make it clearer. As I read it, employed = currently employed, unemployed = not currently employed but actively looking for employment, and not in the labour force = not employed and not actively looking for employment. Is this correct?

Discussion:
The authors call for a greater focus on early education is a reasonable and sensible call to action based on the given data. I do not recall seeing a discussion on the limitations of this study. What might be the methodological limitations of this study? Any potential sampling and/or reporting biases between the Indigenous and non-indigenous populations across these countries? Any recommendations for other researchers interested in replicating this study?

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.