Reviewer's report

Title: Levels and distribution of self-rated health in the Kazakh population. Results from the Kazakhstan Household Health Survey 2012.

Version: Date: 7 May 2014

Reviewer: Morten Wahrendorf

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for sending me this paper on health-differences in Kazakhstan. I found the manuscript to be well-written, clearly structured and of broad interest. The paper extends the existing literature, by describing variations of two self-reported health measures according to a number of socio-demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. I have minor points only, which hopefully help to increase the value of the manuscript.

Abstract

• Last sentence of methods: I suggest adding second house and computer "ownership"

Introduction

• Page 3 / last sentence: ", particularly in studies within populations" In my view this is a new argument and refers to problems of using self-reported measures for country-comparisons. Maybe better state it in a separate sentence.

Methods

• Page 4 / data sources, line 5: "Second, second" please change
• When describing the data source please state how data were collected – face-to-face? CAPI?
• Page 5 / socio-demographic characteristics / first sentence: "the following … were used in the following" please rephrase
• The authors state that income was regrouped into quartiles but groups (table 1) vary by number (ranging from 2546 to 2680). Does this mean that quartiles were not created on the basis of the final sample? Please specify.
• Page 5 / socio-demographic characteristics / last sentence: ",.. and second house as a marker of economic status" – Instead of using the term "economic status" I suggest using the term "material conditions".
• Statistical analyses: Please specify how age was included into the analyses (linear, age groups?)

Discussion

• As a second limitation the authors state that self-reported health is - "in the absence of objective measures" - a useful indicator of health. I agree that
objective measures would have strengthened the case. But the way it is formulated the reader may think that self-reported measures are only useful if objective measures are not available. I suggest rephrasing the sentence.

- Page 7, Last paragraph (line 6): may not "be" reliable
- As a third limitations the authors name a possible response bias which could explain low rates of poor health. Given the high response rate (93%), I wonder whether this may also be related to specific response patterns. Maybe the authors could state how answers varied according to the five answer categories?
- Page 9 / first paragraph: Please use "socioeconomic" or "socio-economic" consistently throughout the manuscript
- Page 9 / first paragraph: Please use the term "socioeconomic position" (SEP) throughout the manuscript (instead of socioeconomic status).
- Maybe the authors could comment in more details why education was most important in their analyses. In its present form the discussion mainly describes methodological advantages (reverse causation, easy available) but some theoretical ideas (possible pathways) would be helpful as well.
- Similarly, more explanations why associations with income became insignificant after adjustments would be good. Because education confounded the association?

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:

No competing interests