Reviewer's report

Title: Is Council Tax Valuation Band A Predictor of Mortality? - Cross-Sectional Study

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Reviewer: Dr Emily Grundy

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

This paper reports on an exploratory study in which mortality in a general practice was analysed by council tax band. In the introductory literature review the authors note various problems with some other indicators of socioeconomic status. They could perhaps refer to a few other indicators, such as income, educational level and social class type classifications based on previous occupation (all of which do have problems also).

Council tax band has been used on some studies (e.g. in the 1996/7 Survey of Disability) and as the authors note, its advantage lies in easy availability. There are a few problems which should be mentioned too. These include the fact that size of dwelling (an important influence on council tax band) is strongly related to size of household, which cannot be controlled here, and so related to factors such as marital status which are known to be associated with mortality status also. Age standardisation should remove some of these problems, but not all. A related issue is that people who have moved in with relatives will be assigned the council tax band of the relatives’ (presumably generally larger) home, rather than their own previous one (e.g. the poor widow with health problems who moves in with a married daughter and family, who may live in a much more highly valued property).

Jargon should be avoided/explained (e.g. UPA8).

Competing interests:

None declared.