Reviewer's report

Title: Diminished mental- and physical function and lack of social support predict shorter survival in community dwelling older persons of Botswana

Version: 1 Date: 16 March 2007

Reviewer: Angel OTERO

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper is contribution to the knowledge of social support, cognitive impairment and reduced physical function in older persons in Africa and to the study of those variables as predictors of survival. Results are in line with the evidences shown in developed countries.
The article is basically an descriptive study with very low number of cases and a monovariate analysis among the survival after 6,8 months of follow-up, as average

The variable “eating meals alone” as a proxy of social support is a nice idea

As the authors note the limitations in the study design and in sample size do not permit to infer causal relationship between the different variables with survival

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Although in the data presented and in the statistical analyses realized there are not mistakes or incorrectness, some comments in relation with the study results, the conclusions and the title are not sufficiently supported by the results shown.

The very scarce number of events (16) prevent the multivariate analysis To present OR adjusted only by age in each condition studied do not allow the conclusions and the title (social support, cognitive impairment and reduced physical function predict shorter survival)

The comment in fourth paragraph of discussion (..the shorter survival of older persons with cognitive impairment and physical disabilities in Botswana implies the lack of care at the stage of critical function decline leads to rapid deterioration and death. . .) even likely it were true, this association between “lack of care” and death is not enough supported by the analysis presented.

The recommendations made in discussion and conclusion section are supported by evidences in other studies, and are remarkable, but are not a direct result of this study.

There is not a connexion among the third paragraph in conclusion (Mental disorders …..constitute a major portion of population’s total health burden …. ) with the arguments presented in paragraph 4 of discussion)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

An update of bibliographic revision is recommended

What next?: Reject because too small an advance to publish
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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 not competing interests