Reviewer's report

Title: Occupation Recorded on Certificates of Death Compared with Self-Report: The Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) Study

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Reviewer: Young-Ho Khang

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Manuscript title: Occupation recorded on certificates of death compared with self-report: The Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) Study

This paper compares job titles and occupational categories (six categories) recorded on the death certificate with that reported before death in the ARIC study. Based on their analyses on the validity (sensitivity and specificity) and reliability (agreement rate and kappa) of job titles and occupational categories, the authors concluded that agreement for occupational categories was reasonably good while agreement for job titles was poor. They suggest that six occupational categories can be used as a socioeconomic position (SEP) indicator. I think this analysis is important since validity of occupational categories can determine the usefulness of death certificate data. My comments are specific, given I have no problems with the overall message of the paper.

[1] In Table 2, the authors provided percent agreement and kappa coefficient when six occupational categories were employed. However, given that white vs blue collar dichotomy or manual vs non-manual dichotomy has been frequently used as SEP in many epidemiologic studies, percent agreement and kappa for this classification would be more informative.

[2] A more important problem in using SEP information of death certificate would be a lack of information on SEP itself. Misclassification problem would be the next. According to the description about the sample, 95% of those who died between 1987 and 2001 had information on occupation recorded on both the death certificates and the questionnaire of ARIC study. This is an important point to be stressed in the discussion section since low percentage of missing SEP information in death certificate data can limit usage of SEP recorded on death certificates.

[3] The authors documented their analysis results in a conclusive manner. For example, they documented that agreement was lower for women than men. However, this is not based on the conventional significance test. Since they provided 95% CIs, they should document their findings based on them.

[4] In Table 1, number of sample (decedents) needs to be documented.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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 no competing interests.