Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 12 June 2007

Reviewer: Peter Byass

Reviewer's report:

General
This is an interesting paper that addresses a significant methodological issue around the validity of occupational coding on death certificates in the USA.

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

The conceptual difficulty that I have with the approach taken is the identification of the ARIC self-reported occupational data as a "gold standard". You discuss possible limitations of validity in both data sources, and so it would seem to me that it would be more reasonable to jettison the "gold standard" concept altogether and use a kappa approach in Table 1 as well as Table 2.

I would also like to see kappa statistics for the inter-coder variation within the coding process (page 6) (and maybe move this to the Results section) - it would be interesting to compare this to the ARIC v. death certificate variation.

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

Results 2nd para: 60% is inconsistent with 67% in Table 2?

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

There are some small language points that need careful re-reading e.g. "The question remains as if..." (p9) Some comment in the Discussion about the potential generalisability and significance of these results in similar settings outside the USA might be helpful.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests