Reviewer's report

Title: Identifying the determinants of premature mortality in Russia: overcoming a methodological challenge.

Version: 2 Date: 7 August 2007

Reviewer: juergen rehm

Reviewer's report:

General

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

The text rightly claims that proxy interviews could be compared to interviews with the controls, but provides no example of such comparisons. Moreover, what should be done, if both sources disagree.

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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)

The referencing is not very specific. To give but one example: For the statement "Specifically, it has been suggested that alcohol is a key proximate driver of the very sharp fluctuations in mortality seen in this group since the mid-1980s including a seven year period when, on average, male life expectancy at birth fell by more than one year for each calendar year." ten references are given, some of which to cross-sectional surveys or to specific disease relations with alcohol.

Abbreviations such as "Surr" for surrogate alcohol on Table 3 should be avoided.

Re: the use of external information, the following is claimed: "It also provided an opportunity to fill an important gap in the literature on proxy informants by asking not just whether indexes or proxies agreed but also which were more accurate and, exceptionally, doing so in relation to issues that are often considered stigmatising and therefore subject to biased informant response." The authors should give one example of a comparison, which demonstrates such comparisons with respect to accuracy. Table 3 provided here is not clearly interpreted in this way, and it is not clear, what the Chi square statistic in Table 3 refers to substantially.

There are at various times superfluous "." in the text.
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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'