Reviewer’s report

Title: The influence of multi-morbidity and self-reported socio-economic standing on the prevalence of depression in an elderly Hong Kong population: are men and women different?

Version: 3 Date: 22 January 2008

Reviewer: John Snowdon

Reviewer’s report:

The authors have examined the relationship between depression and a number of factors, emphasising that the relationship to multimorbidity has not previously been well documented. It was appropriate to look at these relationships in a large Hong Kong population of elderly who volunteered for the study. The methods are adequately described, and sufficient details are provided to allow for replication of the work. The data are sound and appropriately reported. Some of the discussion needs modification (see below), but the abstract concisely conveys the findings of the study. The title is acceptable. The writing needs some attention to grammar and typos by an editor. For example, on page 5, "The means of variables between the two men and women were compared".

Minor essential revisions: On page 5, 3rd line, the authors give an inappropriate reference (number 23) in relation to validation of the Chinese version of the GDS. Because the various tables show data in relation to subjects deemed to be depressed, we need to know what evidence is available in relation to using 7/8 as the cut-off in a Chinese population, using the 15-item version of the GDS, and the authors should give some detail from Lee et al (1993) if that is indeed the correct reference in relation to the cited Chinese version. They suggest (top of page 9) that several mechanisms may explain the association they found between self perceived socioeconomic standing and clinically relevant depressive symptoms, but only later on (among aspects they mentioned as limitations of the study) do they refer to the possibility that depression may lead to negative self-perceptions. They focus on how to prevent the impact of multimorbidity on depression, but it would be appropriate also to consider how to prevent the impact of depression on self-perceptions.

A strength of the study is its size and the range of data provided, including contrasting data from men and women. While not being especially novel, the data add to impressions previously available. It is useful to have reports from varying cultural backgrounds, and even if the sample for this study was selected by advertisement in community centres and housing estates, that does not matter. It is not primarily a prevalence study. Nevertheless, as always, it would have been good to check (e.g by having a psychiatrist independently rate a sample of those with high GDS scores and some with lower scores) whether high scores on the version of the GDS used in this study indicated levels of depression that might warrant clinical intervention.
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: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.