Reviewer's report

Title: Socio-demographic, health-related and psychosocial correlates of fear of falling and avoidance of activity in community-living older persons who avoid activity due to fear of falling

Version: 1 Date: 27 April 2009

Reviewer: Jennifer Anders

Reviewer's report:

Background: The paper adds important information regarding the psychosocial determinants of the geriatric fall syndrome. The main topic, hypotheses and research question are well described. Because studies focusing on fear of falling alone are rare, analyzing participants with and without fear of falling in a first step before differentiating between low and high levels of fear would have been unwise in this field of interest. This basic decision is a limitation in the interpretation of data, like the authors recognized and mentioned in the discussion.

The methods are appropriate and well described. There is a little methodological problem concerning the severity of fear of falling, because a valid, international definition is missing. The authors found a good solution using validated instruments and constructing a model discriminating between the frequencies. There is a similar construct concerning avoidance of activities. Asking for the kind of activities that had been avoided could be a nice alternative for further analyses (Anders J, Flegel N, Dapp U, von Renteln-Kruse W: Measurements of mobility: a comparison of ambulatory rehabilitation patients and healthy community-dwelling persons. The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging (2004), Vol 8; 4; 287).

Statistical procedures are well described and appropriate, too (e.g. simultaneous logistic regression instead of stepwise regression). Data presentation could have been more easy to follow putting together in one table variables with higher levels referring better function or vice versa.

All limitations of the study are mentioned by the authors. The scientific literature was reviewed systematically and compared to the findings of this study. Also the conclusions are correct and supported by the data.

There are 2 thoughts to mention in revising the discussion part more clearly:

1. Community-living elderly are the most heterogeneous population we know. Is there a possibility in ongoing or further analyses of this study group to discriminate better between robust or frail elderly study participants and their outcome (baseline data and follow up?: Kressig RW, Wolf SL, Sattin RW, O'Grady M, Greenspan A, Curns A, Kutner M. Associations of demographic, functional, and behavioral characteristics with activity-related fear of falling among older adults transitioning to frailty. J Am Geriatr Soc. 2001 Nov;49(11):1456-62).?)
2. As mentioned in the discussion, performance-based measures even in a subgroup could be worthwhile. Are there some ideas what to measure or how to confirm fear of falling in another way?

There is 1 discretionary revision to mention in the conclusion part: Fear of falling seems to be an early and strong determinant of functional decline (Friedman et al., 2002, JAGS 50: 1329-1335). So the findings of this study are worthwhile not only to plan clinical interventions for people at high risk like rehabilitation/tertiary prevention or psychotherapy, but even to develop secondary preventive measures targeting fear of falling in early stages.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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'