Reviewer's report

Title: Do self-rated oral health and dental care utilisation depend on socioeconomic factors? Recent evidence from a large population-based study in Sweden

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Reviewer: Ekta Gupta

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Do self-rated oral health and dental care utilisation depend on socioeconomic factors? Recent evidence from a large population-based study in Sweden

The research exploring the role of socioeconomic factors on access to dental care services and on oral health is valuable. However, I am doubtful whether this study adds anything new to the existing health inequalities literature in relation to both Swedish and global context. In theory this study is trying to explore the levels of social inequalities in self-rated oral health and dental care utilisation following introduction of the Swedish complementary dental care reform in 2008. Thus, one of my concerns is that the title of the study is not appropriate and can be worded in terms of dental care reform, which in principal is the only novelty this study provides. Previous studies by Wamala and colleagues (2006) and Donaldson and colleagues (2008), have explored this topic quite extensively.

1) Introduction

Minor points:

Second paragraph lines 71-72 mention ‘Regular dental attendance has been shown to be associated with better oral health’ can add in adults for more clarity.

Second paragraph lines 76-77 mention ‘In this context, not clear which context, need to mention Swedish context

Third paragraph lines 80-82 starting ‘Despite introduction……social gradients in oral health outcomes still persist in Sweden’ needs a reference.

2) Methods

Discretionary Revisions:

For more clarity Methods section should be divided into subsections such as ‘study population’ and ‘variables’. It is not explicitly mentioned how socio-economic status was measured. The authors mention cash margin, employment etc. but later in the results section mention good financial status, so does this refer to ‘cash margin’/ employment or both. This needs more clarity.

3) Results

Discretionary Revisions:

In general results need to be structured around research objectives with sub-sections. At present they are difficult to follow.
A demographic profile of the final study participants would be useful.

Minor points:

Second paragraph, lines 161-162, results not clear, should be supported by statistical values.

Third paragraph, line 165 ‘People with good financial status……..best oral health’ what does good financial status refers to and no reference to any result tables.

Fourth paragraph, lines 180-181 ‘Self-rated poor oral health……..strongly associated’ needs to be supported by statistical values.

Last paragraph, line 195 Spell check ‘Refaining’

4) Discussion

Minor Points:

Opening sentence of the discussion can be better framed in lay terms rather than statistical (Line 203).

Last paragraph (Line 287-288) opening line is misleading and unclear.

Discretionary Revisions:

In general, a comparison of the findings from the previous studies (before the reform) with the present findings (after the reform) would make the discussion better.

The recommendations based on the findings of this and previous evidence should be more explicitly stated. At present, the recommendations are not strong enough. Recommendations synthesising previous and present research findings to suggest course for future studies would be more insightful and useful.

Also the authors should acknowledge that although access to dental care explains health inequalities to an extent, it is not the sole factor. It should be further considered that this study is just focusing on one factor rather than other social determinants. These arguments should be more elaborately discussed.

Implications for policy and research from the study if any should be stated more definitively.

Final Comments:

Again, the novelty of this research is questionable; the authors should present a clear case by outlining what this study adds to the current health inequalities literature especially in relation to Sweden.

References


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