Reviewer's report

Title: Trends in dental visiting avoidance due to cost in Australia, 1994 to 2010: an Age-Period-Cohort Analysis

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Reviewer: Beverley Essue

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Title: Trends in dental visiting avoidance due to cost in Australia, 1994 to 2010: an Age-Period-Cohort Analysis

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Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting paper.

Using four national dental surveys of Australian residents over the age of 5 years, the authors examined the extent to which age, period and cohort factors contributed to the variation in the proportion of Australians who avoided or delayed visiting a dentist because of cost. This analysis of the increasing burden associated with OOP costs for dental care also examines the influence of policy programs in mitigating this burden for subgroups of the population. The authors conclude that dental care policies that target specific age groups, namely the young and very old, and those of lower income levels may be contributing to inequality of access to dental care in Australia.

The paper is well written and addresses an important issue that is currently on the policy radar - the increasing economic burden of accessing dental care in Australia.

The analysis is well described and offers an interesting perspective on the influence of age, cohort and period in explaining disparities in access to dental services due to cost.

Major issue:

1. The paper glosses over the influence of socio-economic status in influencing these trends over time, particularly in light of policy changes over this period to improve access to dental care for lower income households and the background discussion provided in the introduction of the paper. The paper concludes:

"The increasing rates of avoidance due to cost also widen the gap between lower income groups and those that can afford to pay to [for] services such that lower
income families who are not eligible for publicly funded care delay or avoid dental care”

The analysis and results presented do not demonstrate this conclusion. The analysis would be strengthened by adjustment of the models for SES status (i.e. by income, pension status). It is noted that some sensitivity analyses were conducted to assess the influence of private health insurance coverage however, this is not necessarily an ideal proxy for SES. The claims on inequality of access to care would be strengthened by this analysis. Also, did the authors assess any intra-household variations in avoidance of care due to cost which may be independent of age?

Discretionary issue:

1. Did the surveys provide information on OOP costs for those accessing care? This would provide useful context to interpret these results.

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