Reviewer's report

Title: Social class gradients in self-reported health in adolescents: validity and magnitude

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Reviewer: Dermot O'Reilly

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Dear Editor,

Re paper titled Social class gradients in self-reported health in adolescents: validity and magnitude ref no 1045644044134605

Thank you for asking me to review this paper.

I found this to be an unusual and ambitious paper in that it is attempting to address two separate research questions. These are (i) to test the ability of adolescents to correctly identify the occupation and educational attainment of their parents, so that an accurate socio-economic status can be ascribed, and (ii) to correlate socio-economic status and levels of self-reported health status. I will direct my comments to each separately.

(i) Describing socio-economic status of parents.

• I am unsure how much this paper contributes to current knowledge about the ability of researchers to assign a social class for adolescents based on their ability and accuracy of recall of parental occupation, in that the findings are very much in line with other studies that the authors reference.

• In the methods section I was a little surprised to see the ‘no answer’ and ‘don’t know’ responses taken together, unless the assumption is that all of the former meant the latter, though I am not sure if this is necessarily true. I also wonder if some of these ‘missing responses’ were adolescents who chose not to respond in an attempt to avoid what they might consider to be embarrassing replies.

• I found it strange that almost one in four of the respondents could not state their fathers occupation (although this is apparently in keeping with the findings of similar studies), though I could not understand why (only) 14% of highest social class could be assigned; perhaps I misunderstand, but should this also not be at least 24%, assuming there are few one-parent families?

• The heavy use of abbreviations is confusing especially LE which is not explained in the text.

• I cannot agree with the paper’s main conclusion ‘that adolescents can give valid information about their family socio-economic position’ when one in four of the respondents could not state their fathers occupation
(ii) Socio-economic status and self-reported health.

Having established in the first part of the paper that there are deficiencies in the recall of adolescents and some discrepancy between their views and the ‘true’ socio-economic position of their parents, it seems strange to use the adolescents’ views of parental socio-economic status to examine the socio-economic gradients in self-reported health. Surely, this is better done using actual parental socio-economic status, or perhaps it would have been more interesting and informative to compare the gradients using both adolescent and parental information.

In conclusion: This is an important area, and this paper has added some useful knowledge. However, there are some significant issues that would need to be addressed before publication could be recommended.

What next?: Reject because too small an advance to publish

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