Reviewer’s report

Title: Prevalence, awareness, and associated risk factors of hypertension in older adults in Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis protocol

Version: 0 Date: 29 Jun 2017

Reviewer: Tieba Millogo

Reviewer’s report:

General comments

This manuscript is a protocol for a systematic review on the prevalence, awareness, treatment and risk factors for hypertension in older adults in Africa.

The authors think the study is warranted because: (i) the features (prevalence, awareness, complications, treatment and control) of hypertension in older adults in Africa are unknown (or not well-known) (ii) existing attempts were not sufficiently comprehensive (iii) because of multi-morbidity in this age group, hypertension poses different health related problems as compared to younger age groups and (iv) the fast-growing proportion of older adults in the population of Africa due to demographic transition. The authors will be conducting a systematic review of both cross sectional and follow up studies from 1980 to present. They planned to search major electronic databases and the grey literature for unpublished data. The data extraction and assessment of the quality of publications will be conducted independently by two reviewers. A meta-Analysis is planned if the included studies meet criteria, else a narrative synthesis will be presented.

I would like to congratulate the authors for identifying a relevant research topic and presenting a protocol that rigorously adheres to good standards for conducting a systematic review. Hypertension as a common risk factors for NCDs is warrant of attention in Africa with the rising burden of NCDs along with persistent communicable diseases and data among older adults are even more needed. The protocol presented adheres to the core quality principles for systematic review. I therefore found it warrant of publication if the authors can accept to revise/clarify some minor points. My major concern pertains to the time span of the intended review: from 1980 to present (37 years). I would find this "too wide" particularly if one intends to present pooled estimates of the burden of hypertension as we agree on the fast-changing pattern of hypertension due to epidemiologic transition. Going back to 1986 can prove interesting in depicting trends, but if meta-analysis was to be carried out we suggest pooled prevalence are presented per segment of relevant periods that can reasonably be held for homogenous as it was proposed for age groups, sex and locality. I understand Africa as a whole is the scope of this review, but some sections in the rationale tend to suggest SSA is the target…

Specific comments
Title: I suggest adding the treatment and awareness to the title to fully reflect the content. So the title could read as following: prevalence, awareness, treatment and risk factors for hypertension in older adults in Africa: a systematic review and meta-Analysis protocol

Introduction

Line 76: I suggest you replace imperative with needed or warranted

Exclusion criteria

Line 161: since older adults are here defined as 50 years and above, that is beyond the reproductive span (15-49) and so pregnant women are unlikely to be eligible for the study.

Line 163: Is there any rationale for excluding population based studies among refugees? I would tend to think this is making it too restrictive. It's likely that other studies in the general population will fail to capture data on refugees.

Selection of studies

Line 203-204: The criterion for selection of the paper to be included in the review from a set of multiple papers pertaining to the same study population and site needs to be further explained and clarified. There are many concerns: what if the papers are reported data from sufficiently different periods in time? What of the quality of the study (validity?) which does not always equate to "informative"?

"The bibliographies of selected papers will be hand-searched to locate further articles of interest"…I would have moved this to the literature search section.

Data analysis

Line 262: Because Asymmetry of funnel plot can stem from various reasons, funnel plot are generally considered relevant for assessment of "small study effects" (the tendency for smaller studies in meta-Analysis to show larger treatment effects).

Level of interest

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