Reviewer's report

Title: Socioeconomic inequalities in cause specific mortality among older subjects in France

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Reviewer: Bjorgulf Claussen

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Review of the article 'Socioeconomic inequalities in cause specific mortality among older subjects in France'

This is a well conducted study of a topic of a certain interest - social inequalities in cause-specific mortality among middle-aged and old-aged persons in a representative French population, especially focused on mortality of different cancer groups. Here are only some proposals for discretionary revisions below.

The research questions are all well described, methods are adequate, and data seem to be very sound. Results are all over well described and discussed. The limitations are thouroughly considered - may be too much. Precision of death certificates is a problem which is adequately discussed but education as a measure of social inequality I think is too much problematised. That is a good measure even among old people. Life time income might be better but I do not know any study with that variable. The sentence on page 8 para 2 "education does not have a universal meaning" is either unclear or a truism. In all age groups level of education is well suited to compare people in the same group but not people in another age group. This problem is elegantly solved by using RII's and SII's - well described - and hardly any problems is left. Hence, the present analyses are sound.

Page 3 para 2: Only one former study of socail inequalities in health and age was found but another one should also be mentioned, about old aged Norwegian women:


Page 6 para 2: Lower mortality in the two lowest educational groups cannot give a U-shaped curve, it must be J-shaped? The RII's of breast cancer is different from what was found in Norway in a middle-aged population (Strand BH, Tverdall A, Claussen B, Zahl PH. Is birth history the key to highly educated women's higher breast cancer mortality? A follow-up study of 500,000 women aged 35-54.
Int J Cancer 2005; 117: 1002-6.). I think this study should be commented.

The conclusion in the Abstract seems to be too modest - the article gives much more, but maybe it is wise to be focused.

Page 3 para 2: I spend a little time to grasp the sentence "did not provide results by cause of death, age and country", and will propose "did not provide results by cause of death and age across countries".

Page 6 para1: Here Table 3 is used but Table 2 gives the same information and should be preferred for the mere reason of ordered number of tables. Graph 1 is actually three figures, and as far as I can see only the second in commented in the text.

Page 9 para 4: "- is in favour of a selection effect." is misleading - right but not only selection, as the authors comment later (page10 para 1).

Discussion should mostly be in verbal present but from page 10 on much in verbal past.

The English language is mostly good, only minor points should be changed: Skip all "however". Page 4 para5: write "both relative and absolute measures", and some similar small cleanings.

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.