Reviewer's report

Title: Gender differences in the association of social support and social network with self-rated health status among older adults: a population-based study

Version: 3 Date: 28 March 2013

Reviewer: Wendy Birmingham

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Title: Gender differences on the association of social support and social network with self-rated health status among older adults: a population-based study

- Major Compulsory Revisions

3. Quality of written English was poor. A native-English speaker who understands the study is needed to review and revise the manuscript.
   Adequately addressed

5. While I understood the rational for this study, I don’t think it was well set up, nor well defined.
   Adequate addressed

6. The authors’ definition of social support and social networks is less than adequate. Social support and social networks should be more well-defined (networks being the web of social relationships that we maintain; support being the structures of an individual’s social life and the function they may serve, such as emotional support, informational support, belonging support and tangible support).
   The authors say that social support is usually referred to as “some kind of perceived assistance that people receive …” and then go on to describe belonging support. There are differences between the benefits from received support and perceived support.
   This is still a bit murky. Perceived social support is some type of assistance (emotional, tangible, informational) that the person perceives is available to him if needed, not that the person feels they have received. The authors could add a line specifying there are different types of social support, such as emotional support, tangible support, informational support. Then add the line “the different types of social support are embedded within an individual’s social network ….” That would be clearer.

7. Many of the references are quite old. There are certainly more current studies
that would support the authors claims. Additionally, many of the references are not in English which makes it difficult for me to determine their application to the manuscript. As well, when I wanted to check the article cited for the SRH measures, it too was not in English.

Adequately addressed

8. I’m concerned with the validity of the questions ascertaining social support or social networks. Is there validation of these measures?

Adequately addressed

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. In the abstract the authors note that older adults tend to isolate themselves from family and society which might affect their health. My tendency when reading this sentence would be to believe that older adults self-isolate, but older adults may be isolated because their spouses may have died, close friends may have died, health infirmities may limit their ability to get out of the house and socialize. I would request that the authors reword this introduction to more fully represent the unique challenges of aging on social support that may or may not be self-inflicted.

Adequately addressed

2. In the methods section, I am unclear how the sampling was obtained. This seems to be mostly because of the sentence structuring and I believe a native English speaker would be able to correct some of the sentencing problems.

Adequately addressed

3. In the demographic information: education should be listed in a way that is relatable to other educational systems. The income measures should also be listed in a way that is relatable to, perhaps, poverty levels. I do not understand what “minimal wage” levels equate to.

Adequately addressed

4. I need more information regarding “use of health services” being assessed by “health insurance”. Does this mean that someone who does not have health insurance does not use health services at all?

Not addressed. Does having no insurance mean no use of the health care system? This may be true in Brazil; I’m just not sure and would like a sentence clarifying.

5. There were several typos, and serious sentence structure issues. A
A native-English speaker who understands the study is needed to review and revise the manuscript.

Adequately addressed

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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