Author's response to reviews

Title: Social Network Properties and Self-Rated Health in Later Life Comparisons from the Korean Social Life, Health, and Aging Project and the National Social Life, Health and Aging Project

Authors:

Yoosik Youm (yoosik@yonsei.ac.kr)
Edward O Laumann (pb01@uchicago.edu)
Kenneth F Ferraro (ferraro@purdue.edu)
Linda J Waite (l-waite@uchicago.edu)
Hyeon Chang Kim (hckim@yuhs.ac)
Yeong-Ran Park (yeongranpark@daum.net)
Sang Hui Chu (shchu@yuhs.ac)
Won-tak Joo (yochicken@naver.com)
Jina Lee (lovejirosang@gmail.com)

Version: 4 
Date: 12 July 2014

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear editorial board of BMC geriatrics:

We really appreciated your precious and productive comments. Please find enclosed revised version of the manuscript: “Social Network Properties and Self-Rated Health in Later Life: Comparisons from the Korean Social Life, Health, and Aging Project and the National Social Life, Health and Aging Project”, by Yoosik Youm and others.

In the manuscript, we have reflected the additional editorial comments that were received on July 1st 2014 as follows.

1. **One of the reviewers raised the concern on the lack of explanation about the proposed effect of health status on social network measures. That is, what was your theoretical rationale of expecting differences in social network between older people with different health statuses? What have been found in the previous research?**

   We apologize that we have not adequately clarified this matter in the previous revision. There have been tons of researches focused on the relationship between social network and health statuses of older people. By using those previous studies we added our theoretical rationale of expecting differences in social network between older people with different health statuses. We have included the findings from the previous studies on the effects of social network and health in line 105 to 175.

2. **As raised in my previous decision letter, one of the major objectives of this paper is to compare social network structure of KSHAP and NSHAP. However, these two samples differ substantially in economic, cultural, and social dimensions, would the observed differences in social network between two samples (Table 1) be no longer existed after controlling for the differences between...**
American and Korean samples, e.g., education or occupation? In addition, are the age and gender differences in social network found in this study consistent with previous research conducted in the West and the East?

This is the first systematic comparative study on the social network characteristics of older adults between the US and Korea. No previous studies were equipped with this level of elaborated social network survey items for the comparison and thus, we believe it is worth doing even if two samples are quite different (one from a traditional rural village and other one of nationally representative). This is the main reason why PI of each project, Youm (PI of KSHAP) and Waite (PI of NSHAP), started to write this paper from the beginning.

Since Korean sample is quite homogeneous with regard to education and occupation and thus, it is not possible to control for them. However, we still believe that our tentative conclusions about the difference between KSHAP and NSHAP would be valid for two reasons. First, as the table shows, the differences between American and Korean samples are quite distinctive even after controlling for age or gender. We believe these findings are very fresh and important. Second, according to another Korean sample of urban older adults with ego-centric network data (Lee et al., 2014)¹, there was no substantial difference between KSHAP sample and Korean urban older adults with regard to their social network characteristics. This confirms that the differences we found between American and Koreans are not just based on the difference between the rural (KSHAP) and nationally representative (NSHAP).

3. Some jargons are still found in the paper, without giving a proper definition/explanation (e.g., discussion ties).

We changed the terms as follows and we have included definition for all the jargons of social network analysis in the text.
‘Social ties/discussion ties’ ‘social ties for discussion’
‘Discussion partner/confidant’ ‘(social) network member’

4. What’s the range of ratings for self-rated health?

It might not be evident although we explained it in lines 317 to 324 and it was also explained in footnote of table 3.

5. A few measurements were introduced (e.g., longitudinal examination of social network, biomarkers) but these data were not reported in this paper at all. I would suggest removing them from the paper to reduce confusion and to make the manuscript more focused.

    Thank you for the valuable comment. Thanks to your feedback, we removed the part.

6. It is helpful to provide more discussion and interpretation on the findings of the five types of brokerage roles in the conclusion.

    Discussions on the findings of the brokerage roles were included in lines 505-517.

7. Some acronyms are not defined in Table 1, e.g., MS, HS in the row of Education.

    We changed them to the full forms. MS->Middle School, HS-> High School

Again, we appreciate your valuable comments and please let us know if you have any other concerns or suggestions.

Sincerely yours,

Yoosik Youm on behalf of the authors of the manuscript.

Corresponding author: Yoosik Youm. Yonsei-ro 50. Sociology Department. Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea. 120-749., yoosik@yonsei.ac.kr, phone number: 82-2-2123-2431, fax number 82-2-2123-2420