Reviewer's report

Title: Does owning a pet protect older people against loneliness?

Version: 2
Date: 17 June 2014
Reviewer: Desmond O'Neill

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

The first key challenge in this interesting paper is its unquestioning decontextualization of loneliness in later life from loneliness across the earlier stages of life, potentially adding to the stigmatization of later life as 'the' lonely age. Although much of the existing literature is also guilty of this bias, it would be important in gerontological terms for the authors to posit late-life loneliness in the context of loneliness at other stages of life, particularly in Western rather than Eastern Europe, and to explain whether they think late-life loneliness requires the same prism for interpretation as at other stages of life.

The second key challenge is the assumption that national cultural norms are neutral in terms of the reporting of loneliness on a single instrument across Europe (310-315). Some caution should be exercised in reporting exceptional rates of loneliness among middle-aged and older English people... cf Johnson, D. Paul, and Larry C. Mullins. "Growing old and lonely in different societies: Toward a comparative perspective." Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology 2.3 (1987): 257-275.

Minor

Line 103 - 'a' rather than 'the' protection
Line 339 - 'directions' rather than 'directs'
Do we know the level of pet ownership among older people in other European countries?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests