Reviewer's report

Title: Do social networks affect the use of residential aged care among older Australians?

Version: 1 Date: 31 July 2007

Reviewer: Marek Brabec

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This paper deals with certainly interesting topic of substantial practical interest. Its conclusions are written clearly and adequately. Nature of the conclusions seems to be reasonable, and in agreement with what one would expect intuitively. Design of the study is careful and it is clear that the authors took quite a bit of effort to exclude problems and errors. Further, the statistical analysis use adequate methods. Some of them are rather advanced. Unlike in many other studies, important details are taken care of e.g. by the choice of GEE type estimation (to account for intra-individual correlation, etc.), sensitivity analyses, etc.

The only problem with the text is that the description of the methods used is rather brief so that sometimes, it is difficult to grasp the details of what was done. This is true in general, but even more so in the context of propensity scores (and of their generalization to more-than-two-levels situations in particular). Not every single reader of this journal might be familiar with them. We would suggest a (gentle) expansion of the propensity scores idea description in the methodological part of the paper (including a few equations, formulas etc.). It should be specified (formally) what is meant by the word “balance” in this context (see e.g. middle part of page 9) as well.

Description of the study can be made a bit more explicit and rigorous. For instance, from the description on page 6, it is not clear that the six waves correspond to the repeated measurements of the same persons. Later on, one might guess that this is the case (e.g. when reading the comments about Huber-White variance sandwich correction or about longitudinal analyses), but it is not mentioned explicitly.

More details should be given also on page 8, namely the sentence “For participants with incomplete data ... propensity scores were derived using the reduced set of covariates for which complete data were available” should be explained (as it is not clear from the current version of the text what was done exactly). Does it mean that missings were omitted and hence propensity scores underestimated or did you derive different propensity scores formulas for different missing patters? Or something else? It needs to be clarified.

After the corrections, the paper should be published.