Author’s response to reviews

Title: Regional variations in and correlates of disability-free life expectancy among older adults in China

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Cover letter

Melissa Norton, MD
Editor-in-Chief, *BMC Public Health*

Dear Dr. Norton,
Thank you for your helpful suggestions and feedback regarding our manuscript entitled **Regional variations in and correlates of disability-free life expectancy among older adults in China** that we hope to publish in *BMC Public Health*. We have made several changes based on the feedback provided and believe that this has resulted in a stronger and more honed manuscript. The following is a detailed list of the changes that we have made, in the order that they appeared:

**Reviewer 1:** Zachary Zimmer

**Reviewer's report:**
These comments are all in the category of minor essential revisions that the authors should be trusted to make.

The authors have addressed a number of the issues raised by two previous reviewers and have strengthened the paper. The research presented here, I still believe, is very valuable given the regional specificity of DFLE. There are a few remaining issues that I would like to see addressed further.

First, in my earlier review I asked that the authors place the paper in the context of current literature. I believe they could do a better job of this. As they say in their introduction, their paper centers on “health inequality and poor access to health care in rural and less developed areas.” But, little mention is still made of the relevant literature on this topic. So, let me give the authors somewhat better guidance. Martin Whyte has a new paper on the urban/rural health dichotomy in China (I can’t remember the journal but it should be easy to find) and his review of the topic is quite extensive. My colleagues and I have a new paper in *Social Forces (June 2010)* that looks at rural/urban differences in DFLE and will certainly help direct the authors to the relevant literature and debates. They may also want to refer to our earlier 2007 article in *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences* (Zimmer, Kaneda and Spess). Generally, the work by Mark Montgomery and colleagues, which examines regional health in developing countries more generally but does touch on China in places, would be useful to look at. What I am asking for is that this paper does a reasonable job in situating the research in the past literature, which will improve their ability to highlighting the importance of their contribution.

Re: Thank you kindly for providing an outline of this relevant literature. We
have reviewed this research and incorporated it into our article. See pages 2–4.

The following references have been added:


Second, I am pleased that the authors addressed my earlier point number 6, but a discussion of how covariates are measured should appear in the methods section.

Re: We have added a description of the measurement of the covariates in the “Data and Method” section. See page 7.

Explanatory variables were grouped into two categories, socioeconomic indicators and health care indicators, both at the level of the administrative division. Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) was calculated by dividing the total GDP by the population of the administrative division. Proportion of urban residents refers to the urban population (the people residing in urban residential communities) as a percentage of the total population. Illiteracy rate refers to the percentage of people aged 60 and older who could not read or write or who knew fewer than 1500 Chinese characters for people aged 60 and older. The proportion of house utilities is the number of houses that had modern utilities (e.g., running water, shower, toilet, gas and electricity as fuel) divided by the total number of houses. Health care indicators include the number of hospital beds and number of clinicians and nurses, both of which were measured per 10,000 residents. Illiteracy rate and house utilities came from the China 1% National Population Sample Survey in 2005 [22], and all other indicators came from the Chinese Statistical Yearbook 2007 [23].

Finally, the newly added text needs to be edited for stronger English.

Re: We have polished the English throughout.

In addition, we have updated several figures according to the most recent population dataset.
Further attention to these three issues will better prepare the paper for publication.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
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.

Reviewer 2: Flavia C Andrade

Reviewer’s report:
The authors have addressed all concerns from both reviewers. The current draft has improved from the first version and I am confident it will be of interest of those in the field.
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.

Thanks.