Reviewer’s report

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

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Reviewer: 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.

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