Reviewer's report

Title: The effect of housing on the mental health of older people: the impact of lifetime housing history in Whitehall II

Version: 1 Date: 6 May 2011

Reviewer: Sally McManus

Reviewer's report:

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Abstract, results: ‘In multivariate models... GHQ scores for those with housing problems and financial difficulties increased as participants grew older.’ Not sure if I am misreading this, but in Table 1 the increase is only evident for financial dif, not for housing problems. And in Figure 1, based on predictions from the multivariate models, the GHQ score decrease for both. Can you check if this sentence is correct?

2. Abstract, results: To be consistent, stick with two d.pl.s, i.e. 57.7 should (I assume) be 57.70.

3. Abstract, conclusion: ‘There is a social gradient in home ownership and the effects on mental health increase as people get older’. From the cross-sectional-type analysis in Table 1 there is a univariate association evident between tenure and mental health in older people that is not present in younger people. However, your longitudinal analysis controlling for confounders found tenure not to have a causal impact. So I’m not sure that this line should be highlighted as a conclusion. The cross-sectional association is not evidence of direction of effect. (One possibility is that only the most deprived – a subset of those in rented accommodation at phase 1 – remain in rented accommodation at phase 9.)

4. Page 3, second to last line: ‘There is also be a’ – typo.


7. Page 4, second para: definition of fuel poverty is not ‘they spend more than 10% of their income on household energy’ but ‘they NEED to spend more than 10% of their income...’. (The response of some people is to reduce fuel consumption, living in homes below recommended levels of warmth).

8. Page 7: end of second para change “very little' to ‘slight difficulty’” to “very little to slight difficulty”.

9. Page 9: ‘age, period (entered as a dummy variable) housing variables separately,’ – I think that a comma is missing from here.
10. Page 10, para 1: first sentence should open with ‘The’ rather than ‘This’.

11. Page 10, para 2: ‘UK Psychiatric Morbidity Survey’ – this survey was GB not UK.

12. Page 11, para 1, lines 2-3: sentence needs an edit, plus provide a reference for the Burrows’ study.

13. Page 11, para 1: limitations should acknowledge that not only is the ‘housing quality’ data self-report – it also a very vague and non-specific measure.

14. Page 11, para 3: I assume that the survey weights addressed non-response. A description needs to be provided for the weighting strategy used and what this took account of.

15. Page 12: ‘… between housing on the mental…’ – should ‘on’ be ‘and’?

16. Page 13, para 1: ‘form’ should be ‘from’

17. Page 16, ref 38: ‘Lweis’ should be ‘Lewis’

18. Table 2, last line: ‘Model 2’ should read ‘Model 3’.

Discretionary Revisions

1. This paper is about the impact of housing on mental health. Given housing has a major impact on physical health, and physical health has a major impact on mental health, really physical health should be controlled for in the analysis.

2. Likewise, ideally smoking and alcohol consumption would also been controlled for in the analysis, given substance use is associated both with social position and mental health.

3. In older age, owner-occupiers may no longer have a mortgage, while renters enter retirement still having to maintain rental payments. The impact of this on mental health could be acknowledged?

4. There is a sense that there was a linear progression from renter to owner-occupier – was this always so?

5. I’m surprised no mention is made of the English Longitudinal Survey of Aging (ELSA).

6. Page 6, Methods, Data: It would be interesting to know what proportion of the sample are still employed in the civil service? What occupational grade is used for those who have left? How was ‘low grade’ defined?

7. Page 10, para 3: Mention that health susceptibility to low temperature also increases with age.

**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.