Reviewer's report

Title: The effects of house moves during early childhood on child mental health at age 9 years

Version: 1 Date: 24 March 2012

Reviewer: Tim Jelleyman

Reviewer's report:

This study examines the association between residential mobility (defined as 0, 1 or 2+ moves) and behavioral outcomes at age 9yrs in a cohort of children from an ongoing longitudinal Australian study. Three models are considered: moves in three phases over life course, moves over whole time, and a defined change in housing status. A range of covariates are included and adjusted for in the analysis. There is therefore an attempt to consider residential mobility as an independent variable. Appropriate statistical tools are used.

The paper is of interest in the more specialized area of the contextual factors of housing and neighborhood that relate to child behavior outcomes.

1. The authors comment that the sample is 'broadly representative of all women who gave birth in South Australia..' The reference [17] is a study on weaning from same cohort, but not sure if this is the evidence for statement made. For instance, what is the background rate of moving for families with young children, and how does this compare with the study population? Recommend review, and provide more support for this statement if necessary. [Discretionary revision].

2. From another angle they note that at the 9 year follow up the majority of families (81.9%) had purchased their own home; is this still representative of the general population and is there sufficient representation within the study to demonstrate outcome differences for the group with whom we might have the greatest concern? [Minor revision]

3. The empirical findings are adequately constructed. The difficulty is with interpreting and I think this is to some extent covered in the discussion. Certainly the drivers for moving are heterogenous in the first place and unevenly distributed across the population leading to many confounding underlying patterns being likely. The middle paragraph on p14 partly covers this, but could be strengthened. [Discretionary revision]

4. The tables in their current form are difficult to read, partly as the column headers do not transfer across pages in the draft. Also there is a lot of information and it is difficult to quickly see where the significant results are located. This may be addressed in the edited formatting. [Discretionary]
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests