Reviewer’s report

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

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Reviewer: Joseph Gasper

Reviewer’s report:

It was a pleasure to read the manuscript “The effects of house moves during early childhood on child mental health at age 9 years.” The authors make several important contributions to the literature on the effects of residential mobility on child behavioral outcomes by considering the timing of residential mobility, the number of moves, and housing trajectories. The analyses are sound and conclusions generally recognize the limitations of the study. However, I do have some minor comments for revision.

Minor Essential Revisions

On p. 4, the authors claim that prior research on the effects of residential mobility on child behavior is mixed and that prior research has not used longitudinal data or rigorous controls for confounding. The authors should include the following study, which examined the effects of residential mobility on delinquency and problem behavior using longitudinal data and is one of the only studies to use controls for unobserved confounding:


On p. 5, the authors say that the sample is broadly representative of all females giving birth in South Australia, but the sample does not include teenage mothers and is Caucasian. While I am unfamiliar with South Australia, it is unclear how much a sample could be described as broadly representative. The authors should show how the sample is similar to (or differs from) the population of this region and perhaps soften the claim of the representativeness of the sample.

I think one weakness of this study in terms of covariates is that it does not include measures of externalizing/internalizing behaviors prior to moving. It is therefore very difficult to know, even with longitudinal data and the covariates the authors have included, whether the move actually increased behavioral problems in cases where the authors observe significant relationships. Demographic covariates may not be (and are likely not) sufficient to control for pre-existing differences in child behavioral problems. This is probably a tall demand for a data set to have repeated measures of child behavioral problems at such an early age, but this limitation should be acknowledged in the Covariates section and/or Discussion.
For the upward and downward housing trajectory measures, it is unclear whether the authors are simply using measures of housing at each survey date or have retrospective housing histories covering all periods since the last interview. Not having full histories could mean individuals are misclassified (e.g., moves are missed). Please clarify.

The authors should explain the rationale for including interactions with school moves (and there is a very good one), which they currently do not. I also think it would be helpful to say something about this in the conclusion. The finding contradicts with prior research that suggests that the reason for the link between residential mobility and negative outcomes is school mobility.

**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.