Reviewer's report

Title: Social support and age influence distress outcomes differentially across urban-regional and remote Australia

Version: 2 Date: 18 June 2012

Reviewer: Jean Caron

Reviewer's report:

The objectives of the paper are well presented and relevant literature is presented. The presentation of results are excellent and the discussion really scholar and well done.

The method in general is good, sample size allows multivariate analyses and the statistical test used seems appropriate. However I have some concerns about the measures on social support. The authors have combined two different surveys in order to evaluate the relationship between remoteness, social support and psychological distress. The instruments for measuring social support in the remote areas and in the urban context were different and even if they have tried to assess their equivalence through statistical procedure we cannot exclude that the association between remoteness, social support and psychological distress may results in the fact that the two instruments may not have the same sensitivity and measure different aspects of social support.

In fact the authors have not convinced me of the equivalence of the measures of social support even if they have utilized sophisticated method when assessing that equivalence. They report that the Items of HCS personal support scale they has retained by regression analysis explained 19% of the variance of the ARMHS personal support score. And the correlation between these standardized totals displayed a moderate positive correlation in the HCS follow-up dataset, r(1813) = .41, p < .001. These data do not bring a strong evidence of the equivalence of the measure. In the discussion the authors expose this limit and discuss it and suggest that the same measure should be utilized in future study.

I think that this article could be published because it bring interesting hypothesis and the discussion is really good. However the title should be modified for: Social support and age influence distress outcomes differentially across urban regional and remote Australia : an exploratory study

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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' below