Reviewer's report

Title: Social participation and mental health: Moderating effects of gender, social role and rurality

Version: 1 Date: 22 May 2013

Reviewer: Katy Osborne

Reviewer's report:

This is a good paper that makes an important contribution to the literature on social participation and health among older people. The focus on the position occupied within an organisation and the implications for health is a particularly important aspect of this research. I recommend publication and only have a number of minor comments. My comments are detailed below.

Minor essential revisions

The background literature review mainly references older research papers, the most recent being from 2006. Are there any more recent relevant papers in relation to gender, location and older people’s social participation that could be cited? If not, this is important to point out, that this paper is addressing a gap where there has been a lack of research, and a gap that has not been addressed in recent studies. This could also be emphasised in the discussion.

Are there any studies or references that can be cited to support the authors' description of social networks (tightly bonded) in Japanese rural society (at the end of the background section).

In the discussion, the authors largely summarise their 3 notable findings without providing references to contextualise their research with the broader literature. Is each of their main findings consistent with the results of any previous studies? If not, this is important to state, in terms of the significant new contribution this paper makes. Are the conclusions - ie. about the nature of social networks in urban and rural areas - supported broadly by any previous studies?

In relation to using proportion of workers in school district who are employed in agriculture/primary industry as an indicator of rurality, has this been done before in Japanese research?

In terms of the demographic variables (household income, marital status etc) entered into the analysis from responses from the first wave of the survey - how did you consider whether some of these may have changed between the first and second wave - ie. if a spouse had died in that time, or household income had changed. Would this make a difference to the overall analysis? It would be good to clarify this.

In the results section, in the sixth paragraph (beginning with 'Fourth') - it appears
the wrong table is referred to - it should be table 3 and not table 1.

In the following paragraph describing the figures, it is not clear in the figure titles or in the text that they are separately referring to men and women.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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