Reviewer's report

Title: An argument against the focus on Community Resilience in Public Health

Version: 1 Date: 4 November 2013

Reviewer: Alison Cohen

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Major compulsory revisions

1. I would like to see this article engage with more literature to deepen, broaden, and bolster their arguments. See more details below.

2. Background second paragraph- I have seen better descriptions of the distinction between deficit-based and assets-based approaches; I know what the distinction is, but if I were a reader new to this concept, there wouldn’t be quite enough information here for me to understand what was going on. I would recommend referring to work by McKnight and others about asset-based community development, and you may also find some work by Minkler and/or Wallerstein related to community-based participatory research to be useful.

3. While this does not attempt to be a systematic review, this does not include literature by key researchers in the field of resilience, including, most notably, Suniya Luthar. (The authors do use research from other key leaders, including Ann Masten.) Since I know these off the top of my head, it’s also easy for me to suggest that you may also be interested in some papers on resilience that I have participated in, including:

   • Jain S, Cohen AK. “Fostering resilience among urban youth exposed to violence: A promising area for interdisciplinary research and practice.” Health Education & Behavior. 2013; Epub ahead of print. doi: 10.1177/1090198113492761. This paper has a table of different conceptualizations of resilience from different disciplines that may be of interest.


Given that I have identified these gaps in their review of the literature, it is quite possible that there are other gaps as well that are beyond my knowledge, so I’d like to have a little bit more reassurance that you have searched comprehensively or discuss the literature you were restricted to as a limitation.

4. One thing to consider that I think would be important to add to your argument: when should findings about the positive effects of certain types of social capital in advantaged neighborhoods be extrapolated to disadvantaged contexts? There are some researchers who believe that resilience is only when individuals/communities are already disadvantaged, which implies that there may
be some effect measure modification by disadvantage.

Minor essential revisions

1. The references include some typos and formatting errors and need to be reviewed and corrected accordingly.
2. Page 8: should read “Native American,” not “native-American”.
3. I think in general, the word count could be a little lower.
4. Background second paragraph- the sentence that begins “Resilience is also a concept…” should probably be the start of a new paragraph for the rest of the text that follows in that paragraph. These seem to be separate enough ideas.
5. Page 11, “of what” paragraph- there are some good examples of defining neighborhoods for government purposes with community input to make the boundaries more meaningful in New York City, which may be worth exploring in greater detail and perhaps mentioning.
6. Page 12-13: about the five-capital approach- it seems worth acknowledging that these different types of capital quite likely quite often co-occur to create cumulative advantage/cumulative disadvantage, so it is not necessarily quite as simple as not having one type of capital but having another (although this is nevertheless possible, plausible, and worth exploring).
7. For the paragraph about the Capability approach, should we assume that all of this is based on Sen’s work that you cite in the previous paragraph? If so, it would be nice to have Sen cited somewhere in this paragraph as well; it would be even better if this synthesized across a few different pieces (including, perhaps, some of the literature that has been written in response to Sen’s book).
8. The sentence that begins “One criticism of having a large Welfare State…” should include a citation at the end. It would also be nice to compare the UK welfare state to other government structures (at least in the west), given that BMC Public Health has an international audience.
9. On page 9, the sentence that begins “There are numerous problems with this: for example…” should include a citation. (The previous sentence may also require a citation, unless it is deemed to be sufficiently common knowledge.)

Discretionary revisions

1. Your point about “as-you-should-be endpoint” requiring a value judgment is great, and it seems like this might make an opening for engaging with philosophical literature about what should be. I would really like you to. Given the UK context, Richard Layard and Judy Dunn’s A Good Childhood could be useful for your example on page 7 (or this may be an unnecessary tangent).

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
**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.