Reviewer's report

Title: The wider social environment and changes in self-reported quality of life in the transition from late childhood to early adolescence: a cohort study

Version: 1 Date: 15 December 2005

Reviewer: James Rohrer

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper has several strengths. These include its longitudinal design, large sample size, excellent writing, and use of multi-level statistical methods. An interesting and important research question is addressed. The abstract is good.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. The methods section reports surveying 7286 people with a response rate of 48%. However, the tables of descriptive statistics show 472 respondents, which would be a much lower response rate. This should be clarified.

2. The regression models do not adjust for the usual determinants of health: smoking, obesity, lack of physical activity. Also race or ethnicity seems to have not been addressed. This is a serious problem since it opens the door to possible confounding. This omission should be acknowledged in the limitations section of the paper.

3. Could a few questions be used in place of the longer questionnaires? Crime rates and safety concerns, for example, might capture all you need to know about neighborhood environments, along with the availability of parks, sidewalks, and the ability to walking to school or recreational activities. For many people factor analysis of multiple items has great entertainment value, but other investigators may want to carry on this line of investigation by capturing the critical concepts while including additional variables addressing potentially important confounders. Does the data reveal which items are essential to include in future studies and which were not related to health status? Please mention this point under ‘suggestions for future research’ in the discussion.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. When talking about satisfaction the authors should specify what kind. The methods section does not specify that life satisfaction was measured, though presumably that is what was done.

2. General health and mental health were measured as continuous scales and means were used despite some skewness in the data (eg mean of 80, range 23-100). The authors should explain why the usual approach of dichotomizing health status when it is used as a dependent variable was not followed in this study.
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

none

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.