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: 2 Date: 20 February 2006

Reviewer: James Rohrer

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors seem not to appreciate the fact that many of the readers of this paper will be approaching it from a public health perspective, not as research psychologists. As such, they will be more convinced of the merits of an epidemiological approach. Epidemiologists tend to use fewer items to measure constructs, where possible, so that they have room left on the form to include a full set of confounders. Research psychologists tend to use as many questions as possible to capture a construct and to be less worried about addressing a full of confounders. Each approach is a compromise and each has its merits as well as its weaknesses. The authors have written this paper from the perspective of a research psychologist. Even so, they should show respect for the epidemiological perspective and acknowledge the weaknesses of the paper in regard to information about confounders and information that would enable development of abbreviated scales.

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

1. The lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the sample should be recognized as a weakness and mentioned in the limitations.

2. Since many public health reviewers would regard physical activity as having a direct effect on quality of life and health, the limitation section should specifically mention the omission of this variable as a weakness.

3. Public health practitioners and epidemiological researchers would find it difficult to adopt in their entirety the instruments used in this study because of their length. The lack of practicality of long questionnaires for public health research should be acknowledged as a weakness of this study. If a short list of questions could be offered as being sufficient, some readers would appreciate it. However, that task probably is beyond the scope of this paper and so it should be mentioned as an important task for future researchers to address.

4. Usually when self-rated health is presented in the international public health literature it is used as a dichotomous dependent variable. Not following this convention reduces the comparability of the results to other published work in the field. This should be mentioned as a limitation of the study.

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

none
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'