Reviewer's report

Title: Rating Neighborhoods for Older Adult Health: Results from the African American Health Study

Version: 1 Date: 11 April 2007

Reviewer: Jessica Kelley-Moore

Reviewer's report:

General

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

The question of how neighborhoods affect health is of significant interest to scholars. However, to date there have been few studies with the ability to test this relationship empirically. This paper provides one of the first examinations of the psychometric properties of neighborhood measures and additionally demonstrates that these measures are indeed related to health.

My comments below may help sharpen the presentation of these findings and increase the utility of this paper for the field.

1. The introduction is a bit disjointed, referring obliquely to social theories of place and the general interest in whether (and how) neighborhoods affect health. The primary purpose of this paper – and most significant contribution – is not fully explained in the first pages. I recommend reframing this section to highlight the need for systematic study of neighborhood measures, particularly the elements related to validity and reliability. Because this line of inquiry is so new, studies of neighborhood effects use widely variable measures. Your paper moves us one step closer to being able to replicate measures and procedures across studies. This potential contribution is not strongly articulated in the Intro or Conclusions.

2. In that vein, I suggest narrowing the health outcome to one. It would help demonstrate the utility of these measures, but would help sharpen the focus of the entire paper. Page 16 demonstrates your long history of significant neighborhood effects for health outcomes, so I’m not sure it’s entirely necessary to provide three health outcomes in this paper. If you keep all 3 outcomes, please see note #5.

3. The authors do an excellent job of subdividing the analysis into phases. I suggest making this a stronger portion of the paper, explaining to the reader what is learned at each phase. This can be carried through to the Discussion. For example, little is made of the comparison of interviewer-rated and respondent-rated neighborhood scores.

4. Based on the substantially different findings, I am surprised that the authors did not address the inner city/suburb differences more thoroughly. I suspect that there are interesting findings here since these two areas confound type of residences/environment, race of respondents, and income level of respondents. Did interviewer effects vary by these two areas?

5. Table 4 seems “flipped” to me. It is difficult to discern the differences in models. I recommend switching the rows/columns. In addition, there are no model fit measures to determine if there was an improvement in overall fit across the nested models.

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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. On page 14, the first sentence under “Phase 3” is not clear. I’m not sure what this meant related to your findings.

2. It is not clear what is presented in Table 2. Could this be improved?

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
**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:** 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