Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Luisa N Borrell

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript addresses an important issue, neighborhood self-rating on an older population. The latter is important as the aging population increases, and thus, is more likely to remain in their communities. This study propose to ‘provide an overview of our training, field methods, and measurements characteristics of the resulting AAH Neighborhood Assessment Scale. There is however some room for improvement.

Introduction

The introduction is too long and somehow dilute the message. Specifically, there is a lot discussion about neighborhood SES using Census data as well as other neighborhood characteristics but not discussion of previous studies using self-rating neighborhood measures. The aim of the study could be more specific. In addition, a reference to the outcomes to be studied should be made in the introduction. Page 4, first paragraph, line 4, the sentence starting ‘Reductions in the impact of individual SES factors on these…” seems to be missing something as it is not clear what ‘these’ is referring to. Page 5, third paragraph, the discussion about their findings from an earlier study should be presented in the discussion section of the manuscript.

Methods

Participants The age range of the study participants and perhaps sex distribution should be stated. Similarly, the authors should mention how many participants were enrolled in the inner city and how many in the suburban area. Page 7, last sentence of the first paragraph, it is not clear how the second part of the sentence relates to the first. Perhaps these are two separate sentences. Were the participants clustered by block?

Instrument This section could be shortened. Specifically, the first three paragraphs seem very general; the fourth paragraph seems to be the essence of this section and could benefit from more details such as the specifics of the modification done to the original scale. Please include a reference for the original scale. The authors should consider including the original rating system and the modified versions as an appendix.

Outcome measures The outcomes were never introduced in the introduction or the aim of the manuscript. The authors could build the introduction around the outcomes.

Analysis Although the authors provide a detailed description for each phase of the analyses, because the methods used are mostly psychometrics and the audience of this journal may be broader than psychologists, the authors should consider to be more specific on explaining the purpose or outcome expected for each phase and how they are connected. For example, in page 11, phase three seems to use the result obtained from phase one as its outcome. In the description of phase four, the authors stated ‘we conducted logistic regression models forcing in the rating scale….’ Perhaps the authors should consider re-phrased the sentence stating that the rating scale was the main predictor.

Results

The results discussion included a lot of details that could have been presented in the instrument discussion, especially in Phase 1. The description of Phase 2 is hard to follow perhaps because there are not results presented in a table. Phase 3 does not present a comparison of the global rating by subjects to the interviewers rating scale instead the table presents the participants rating scale means by the categories of the global rating. The direction of the rating scale system should be stated in the text either on the methods or the results section. In phase 4, third sentence, the authors stated that there was no association of interviewers experience and scale score (beta coefficient 0.326) perhaps the presentation of the p-value will be more efficient here as the coefficient does not state whether the association was significantly different or not. The finding of an interviewer effect (Table 3) is troubling and deserve some further examination. Perhaps the authors should examine the age and health status of the participants by interviewers, most of the interviewers with a significant effect have a negative coefficient indicating a better rating so it is possible that younger and/or healthier participants were interviewed by the interviewers with significant effects. The
description of the results in Table 4 should state that the association with the neighborhood rating scale was not associated with any of the outcomes after adjusting for selected individual characteristics. In addition, the authors should consider adjusting the analyses for an objective measure of neighborhood such as the US Census SES aggregate measure, namely median income, value of the owner occupied household, percentage of people with high school degree or employed at the block level. A table with the participants’ characteristics should be included.

Discussion
The authors should state that there was no association between the outcomes of interest and the rating scale system in this study. In addition, the authors should discuss or compare the study findings as they relate to findings from previous studies using the original Chicago Neighborhood rating system.

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

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests