Reviewer's report

Title: Perceived neighborhood safety and incident mobility disability among elders: the hazards of poverty

Version: 1 Date: 26 October 2008

Reviewer: Kristina Sundquist

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

The manuscript is well-written and the methodology is sound. The topic is highly relevant as the elderly population is growing in most western countries. I only have minor comments.

Minor essential revisions

Abstract:

1. The conclusion is vague and should be revised. The findings only support that interventions should address perceived safety, not actual violence in the neighbourhood. Please see the discussion section, page 23, line 3, in order to find a more proper conclusion that is supported by the findings of the present study: “…intervening in the psychosocial dimension of perceived safety may be useful among elders.”

Background:

2. The background section could be shortened. Many of the comparisons with other studies could be incorporated into the discussion. The background should rather provide a stronger focus on what this study actually adds to previous literature, e.g. the longitudinal design and the inclusion of two aspects of neighbourhood disadvantage, i.e. perceived neighbourhood safety and neighbourhood crime rates.

Methods:

3. Page 6, second paragraph, line 5: Please explain the difference between the three types of housing so that international readers can understand the difference between e.g. public housing and community housing.

4. Page 8: I do not agree that the construct validity of the neighbourhood crime rates can be assessed by calculating the ecologic correlation between measured neighbourhood crime rates and perceived neighbourhood safety. The measured crime rates are only a crude proxy of the actual crime rates although it is a useful proxy that could have some value when comparing neighbourhoods. Please see below.
5. Page 10, paragraph 4, line 2: How were former smokers classified? Please clarify.

Results:

6. Page 14, paragraph 1: I know that many authors like to use the expression “borderline significance” although I have never favoured this expression myself. In addition, I have never seen in the literature the expression “borderline significance” when the p-value is e.g. 0.04. I suggest that the authors provide the reader with the actual p-value (0.06) and delete the expression “borderline significance”.

Discussion:

7. Please mention that this study suffers from a potential self-report bias.

8. Another possible limitation is that this study was based on relatively old data (follow-up between 1982-1990). The authors should mention this and then say that this will probably not affect the generalizability of the results.

9. The main limitation is that the measure of neighbourhood crime was based on newspaper reports. The authors have mentioned this in the discussion section. Please discuss if this represents a differential or non-differential bias.

Discretionary revisions

Discussion:

10. The discussion could include as a major strength the high response rate (82%). This is currently not mentioned in the discussion section.

11. Page 22, paragraph 2: I believe that the use of two measures of disadvantage, perceived neighbourhood safety and neighbourhood crime, is a major strength when analyzed as separate constructs because this approach clearly shows that the two measures represent two different aspects of neighbourhood disadvantage. The authors should mention this as a strength rather than as a limitation.

12. Current word count is 5851, which is perhaps a bit too long. The authors could consider shortening the manuscript or letting the Editor decide.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.