Author's response to reviews

Title: Linking social and built environmental factors to the health of public housing residents: a focus group study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Harris:

Thank you for reviewing our manuscript, “Linking social and built environmental factors to the health of public housing residents: a focus group study” (MS: 1474728340148737). We appreciate the feedback from your editors and reviewers. We have revised the manuscript to address these comments, which we have outlined in the table below and have highlighted in red text in the manuscript.

<table>
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<th>Comments</th>
<th>Authors’ Response</th>
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<td>1. The paper states that “Participants received a $25 gift card as compensation for their time” – it’s good practice to declare where the voucher was for, allowing the reader to make judgements as to whether this might impact participant motivations or influence the participant selection process.</td>
<td>-We used Visa gift cards to compensate our participants. We have added this to the methods section as suggested. (page 4, line 22)</td>
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<td>2. The statement “We reached thematic saturation after six focus groups” suggests that data analysis was undertaken concurrent to data collection. If this is the case then this should be mentioned.</td>
<td>-To determine when data collection should be halted, the moderator and assistant moderator had a debriefing session after each focus group to discussing overarching themes as compared to prior groups in order to determine when we had achieved thematic saturation. We have added more details about this process to the text. (page 5, lines 11-15)</td>
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<td>3. The four themes identified are interesting however they are not contextualised well within the existing (and broad) literature in this area. The relationship between themes is also not discussed. For example, theme four seems to be very much related to the built environment. By stating that resident groups in different courts display different relationships, the study essentially identifies that the way the neighbourhood is designed has quite a specific effect on sense of community. To a built environment professional this might be a really interesting finding! However without any description of the built context (as recommended below) it is difficult to explore how the built form might attenuate relationships.</td>
<td>-We have contextualized the themes within the broader literature as detailed below. -We have added a new section to the discussion about the interaction between the built and social environments, as suggested. (pages 13-14) -We have added a figure of the community layout and a detailed description of the built environment to the first paragraph of the methods section as requested. (page 4, lines 8-13) -We are limited in our capacity to discuss how the built form may influence social relationships, as we did not obtain address information on our participants due to confidentiality protections. We cannot place them within the neighborhood to begin considering these factors. We have noted this limitation (page 15, lines 18-19) and do agree that an exploration of how the built form might</td>
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4. Would it be helpful to include a table of all themes and subthemes? Were there other subthemes identified that are not explored here? 
-Table 2 includes an overview of all themes and subthemes presented in this paper. We present all relevant subthemes to the themes identified.

5. The discussion section could be more succinctly structured perhaps making better use of subheadings?
-We have added subheadings as suggested.

6. The acknowledgement of the study’s weaknesses appear a little tokenistic. Qualitative research will never be generalizable so it’s not particularly necessary to acknowledge this as a weakness. Instead, it might be better to say “This is a qualitative study. It’s the aim is not to produce results generalizable to other populations but to provide deeper insights into a particular problem....” or something like that.
-We have removed the text in question and added a statement as suggested. (page 15, lines 21-23)

7. More work needs to be done on defining what is meant by the social and built environments and situating the impacts of these on human health and social connection in existing literature. These two influences are key to the paper’s analysis however they are not well set up. First, a detailed description needs to be given of the built environment – what is the density? How is housing configured? Is it high rise? How is it currently governed and allocated? What is the context relative to the urban area in which it is situated? As for the social environment, what exactly is meant by this term? Does it include the cultural context?
-We have added a detailed description of the built environment to the first paragraph of the methods section as requested. (page 4, lines 8-13)
-We have added a figure that displays a map of the community.
-We considered the social environment to include neighborhood social structure and interpersonal relationships – we did not include cultural factors in this study. We have clarified this in introduction (page 3; lines 18-19) and added the lack of cultural factors as a limitation (page 15, lines 20-21).

8. Page 10, Line 22: The statement that “We build upon these prior studies by identifying factors that public housing residents perceive exacerbate these conditions, including housing authority enforcement of lease terms and the behaviors of other residents” refers to the idea that individual health is impacted by structures of provision (including housing governance) and wider socio-cultural processes. This is not necessarily a novel finding and it needs to be tied in to broader literature in this area. Fran Baum’s work is particularly insightful in this area.
-We have included a statement in this paragraph regarding the broader literature in this area, beyond what is known within US public housing populations. (page 11, lines 19-21)
-Thank you for suggesting Dr. Baum’s work, which we have referenced in this section as well as in other parts of the discussion.

9. The address to the impact of crime and fear of crime on the uptake of health promoting behaviours needs to be augmented and, again, situated within existing literature in this area. Commonly known as “CPTED” (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design), the authors should review the work of Paul Cozens, Gregory Saville and others.
-We have added additional information regarding influences of perceived safety and crime on health among low-income communities. (page 12, lines 16-18)
-We have added information on CPTED. (page 12, lines 19-22 and 25-26; page 13, lines 1-2)

Reviewer #2
The paper is excellent but I did notice that more emphasis was on the social than the built environment. This may well have been because of the world bank guide which was used. The paper, I think, would be strengthened with the addition of the semi-structured guide used to inform the focus groups.

Editorial comments and requests
We have added in a new Table 1 that includes the questions from our semi-structured guide.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Great paper but please address each of the comments by the reviewers. Kent is much more detailed and an excellent review so needs to be attended to carefully please. Check the paper for minor editing requirements please.</th>
<th>-Thank you. We have addressed the comments from reviewer #1 (Kent) as indicated above.</th>
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<td>Please separate the Competing Interests and Authors Contributions sections.</td>
<td>-We have made this change as requested.</td>
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<td>RATS guidelines: In accordance with BioMed Central editorial policies (<a href="http://www.biomedcentral.com/about/editorialpolicies#StandardsofReporting">http://www.biomedcentral.com/about/editorialpolicies#StandardsofReporting</a>), could you please ensure your manuscript reporting adheres to RATS guidelines (<a href="http://www.biomedcentral.com/authors/rats">http://www.biomedcentral.com/authors/rats</a>) for reporting qualitative studies. This is so your methodology can be fully evaluated and utilised.</td>
<td>-We have made modifications to ensure that we meet RATS reporting criteria as follows: ( R ) – Our research objective is stated and we have provided justification for exploring this objective in the introduction. ( A ) – We state that we used focus groups and have added a statement regarding our justification for selecting this method. ( T ) – We have more explicitly stated our sampling as using volunteers and justified this decision. Our recruitment procedures are described. We have detailed our data collection methods, study group characteristics and setting, and our procedure for ending data collection. We have disclosed the researchers roles. We have also added in details of the informed consent, protections for anonymity and confidentiality, and IRB approval of this study. ( S ) – We describe our use of an inductive thematic analysis that we selected given the exploratory nature of this study. We have provided quotes to represent each subtheme and have indicated the number of focus groups where each theme and subtheme was discussed. Themes and subthemes were generated by a subset of the study team, which were then reviewed and contested by other study team members. With respect to discussion and presentation, we have discussed our results with respect to the current literature and new contributions that this work providers. We have included a paragraph discussing our strengths and limitations.</td>
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<td>We recommend that you copyedit the paper to improve the style of written English.</td>
<td>-We have carefully copyedited the manuscript.</td>
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We believe that we have addressed the above comments, which have improved the manuscript. We hope it is now acceptable for publication in *BMC Public Health*. Thank you for your reconsideration of this manuscript.

Sincerely,

Kimberly A. Gudzune, MD MPH