Reviewer's report

Title: Personal social networks and organizational affiliation of South Asians in the United States

Version: 0 Date: 28 Nov 2017

Reviewer: Stephanie Child

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper. Overall, I think this paper offers an excellent review of the MASALA study design and measures, insight into the networks of South Asian (SA) Americans, and a review of network characteristics that are relevant within the health literature.

Introduction:

The rationale for the study of social networks among South Asian Americans is well written, as is the majority of the paper.

However, the introduction of this paper focuses heavily on the role of networks on health, so I was somewhat disappointed to discover that this paper does not actually look at associations between network characteristics and health outcomes. While the author provides a clear purpose statement for the paper, which is to describe network characteristics of SAs known to be associated with health, including the discussion of health with alters (which is valuable and important information), I would remove some of the more explicit language that might confuse readers, such as "the linkages between social networks and health" (line 107), since you do not actually look at these associations.

Methods:

In the methods, you mention the use of multiple name generators, but then only describe one: discuss important matters. Later, in the results, we discover that organizational ties were recorded from perhaps another name generator? It is unclear. Or were organizational ties/roles part of the interpreter questions from the discussant question? Please clarify within the text.

We also happen upon this information in the results section: "After reporting all their ties, respondents were asked in more detail about the 6 places they attended most frequently (Table
5). (line 316). Please provide more information in the methods section about the six places mentioned. How was this data collected? Were they pre-defined in the survey or were they categories determined from an open-ended question? What's the difference between a 'Spiritual CBO' and a church/temple/mosque? Describe/define what you mean by the spiritual CBO. In the results you mention six places, but in the table, there are only five categories: CBO, Spiritual CBO, church, temple, mosque. Please clarify what you mean.

The high negative correlation of effective network size with density is concerning. Can you describe effective network size a little bit further? If it's just the inverse of density, what is the novelty or additional information that we are gaining by measuring this? Perhaps you can describe what a peculiar case might look like, such a network that is either high or low on both scales, if that's possible.

Does the linear regression control for any demographic variables? If not, be more descriptive, that these are bivariate statistics. Why not conduct ordinal regression for ordinal variables? Provide rationale or support for using linear regression for ordinal outcomes.

Did your study limit the analyses to cases/participants with complete data? How much missing data is there? Please describe.

Results:

The main body of the text is well written and organized; however, the tables are less clear.

The trend tests in Table 2 are confusing. Specifically, for the trend tests for Traditional Cultural Beliefs and How SA/American do you feel, it seems as though the trend test is assessing differences in the continuous scale, but in the table you are reporting on tertiles for Cultural Beliefs or high versus low for How SA or American do you feel. Please clarify which approach you are using and align with how the data are being reported in Table 2. For example, why not use a chi-square test to examine differences in high/low dichotomy of feelings on how SA/American?

Table 5 is also somewhat confusing. The information reported in tables should always be able to stand alone (no need to read through text to understand.) Therefore, be more descriptive about what the response categories associated with the asterisks are. I would be more clear that you dichotomized the response options (right?) and state something like: "*Indicates participants who reported 'A little bit, somewhat, quite a bit or very much' versus 'Not at all'" (or whatever the other categories were). And the same for the second dichotomization.
Discussion:

The current study should not be directly compared to the NSHAP study because the methodology is different. The NSHAP places a smaller limit on the number of alters reported, and the current study allows a much higher limit (10). Therefore, you cannot say that SA networks are larger than those reported by participants in NSHAP. Instead, you might say something like previous network studies may not have captured the full extent of the personal network, and the current study may be more reflective of the true network size.

Please cite the study of social networks in urban India that you describe. (line 346-347)

You generalize your findings to all SA Americans in several places throughout the discussion, which is problematic. Your findings are based on SA Americans who live in the metropolitan areas of SF and Chicago, and may be different from SA Americans living in other parts of the US. You do mention this briefly in the limitations section, but I would just be more careful with referencing SA American populations throughout the discussion.

"This study provides a unique opportunity to investigate the connections between health and social context…" You don't actually do that in this paper. Please reword to indicate what the current study (this manuscript) actually does. Or you might instead say something like: "As future work continues, the broader MASALA study will provide a unique opportunity to investigate the connections between health and social context"

Grammatical/clerical issues throughout document:

* Spell out small numbers: 6 should be written six, 2nd should be written second

* Define all acronyms: SA in abstract

* Statistics from the tables should be mirrored in the text (unless the journal instructions indicate otherwise): so your reporting of network size should be 5.6, not 6, etc. in the body of the text (line 246)
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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