Reviewer's report

Title: Depression and the nature of Trinidadian family practice: a cross-sectional study.

Version: 1 Date: 9 August 2006

Reviewer: Walter W Rosser

General: This is an interesting descriptive paper identifying, in a cross sectional study, the frequency of depression in people attending family physicians offices in Trinidad. This is an important issue since the government and funding agencies in Trinidad do not consider mental health issues as very important. These agencies do not accept that mental health issues are and can be effectively dealt with in family practice but consider that they are only dealt with by psychiatrists or mental health teams which are in short supply and underfunded. The question asked by the author is clear. The methods are clearly described. It is important in Trinidad that the ethnic mix of the population be represented in the sample and it is well represented in the sample analysis. The data seems to be sound. There is relatively little description of the methods of data collection. Was it done by research assistants or the author? Was collection done in waiting rooms or in private offices?

The manuscript does adhere to reasonable standards of data discussion, considering this is a descriptive study. The discussion is quite extensive bringing in comparisons with data from Trinidad and other Islands. I am unsure about asking the question "Can we believe the results of the study?" It might be more appropriate to be more positive and say the two factors mentioned build confidence in the results obtained. It is mentioned that people may not talk about embarrassing issues in a waiting room. This is why clarification of the methods of data collection is important. In small communities it is also important to know who collected the data and were they known to the members of the community.

I am not comfortable with the question "How should the information from this study be used?:" I would suggest a statement that the results of this study could be used in the following ways. The author might consider creating a table with suggested use of results directly linked to the supporting finding in the study. This would highlight these recommendations.

The conclusion in the abstract has a different emphasis than the section under conclusions in the text. I would ask the author to provide a heading in the text :Conclusions; and then state the conclusions clearly. Eliminate the statement "To conclude" The conclusions are confusing. I would suggest 1 there is a hidden burden of depression in Trinidad. There are inadequate resources to adequately deal with the problem resulting in economic and social costs. Deficiencies include inadequate mental health teams, inadequate training of Family Physicians to treat depression, inadequate time in public clinics for physicians to deal with the depression, and failure of government to recognise the problem. More discussion and emphasis on some of these conclusions in the discussion is needed if they are to be included.

The bibliography adequately supports the work. The paper could be strengthened if search strategy and inclusion criteria were outlined for the lit search. In table 1 the section- status of relationship and Age above 50 and below could be eliminated as they are repetative.

The only further question is if BioMed central is interested in publishing such country specific data. There is no question about the value of this work in Trinidad. There is a real opportunity to improve policy towards dealing with depression and other mental health issues in Trinidad. Whether Biomed central sees this as relevant for its publication is up to the editors. I would support it's publication having knowledge and interest in Trinidad and it's health care system.

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

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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the depression, and failure of government to recognise the problem. More discussion and emphasis on some of these conclusions in the discussion is needed if they are to be included.
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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
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What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing financial interests. I do know the author and have visited Trinidad and Tobago on a number of occasions and am interested in improving the health care delivery system especially at the primary care level.