Reviewer's report

Title: How do men and women with depression articulate their distress and engage with health professionals? A qualitative interview study

Version: 1 Date: 18 January 2007
Reviewer: Christopher T Kilmartin

Reviewer's report:

General

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

Major Compulsory Revisions:

If you continue to have access to your participants, ask them to complete an instrument that measures some dimension(s) of psychological gender and re-sort your data according to this (or these) dimension(s). If you cannot do so, at least report some data on sex similarities and gender diversity within each sex and recommend that future researchers include designs that do not simply treat male and female as psychologically monolithic concepts.

Below are some comments according to the questions posed in the email that accompanied the article:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The question posed is not new, however a great deal of work is yet to be done on men’s and women’s experience of depression. The question is not well defined because the authors’ definition of gender is conflated with biological sex, and the literature is clear that men and women are overwhelmingly more similar than different when measured on psychological dimensions.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

The methods are well described, and it would be easy for another researcher to replicate. However, there is a serious methodological flaw. The researchers treated sex and gender as equivalent and failed to measure participants on any psychological aspect of gender. Thus, we do not know the extent to which participants subscribe to cultural standards of masculinity and femininity and the extent to which their gender beliefs affect their levels of distress and engagement with health professionals. In fact, men in the sample have described themselves as depressed, a decidedly unmasculine label from a cultural standpoint, causing me to suspect that they are different from average men on a critical dimension of the study.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

This is an exploratory and descriptive study and thus is not intended to be well controlled or representative of the general population. The researchers did a good job at forming and executing an interview protocol and in reporting the limitations of the convenience sample. However they did not report the limitations of equating sex with gender.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Yes. Data are clearly reported.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Yes, within the limitations of a less-than-adequate research design.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?


The title is not very clear in that the “men and women” could be construed as “people” and therefore the reader does not necessarily know that the article is about the contrast. The abstract is very clear.

7. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes.

As it now stands, this is an article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal. In fact, it would reinforce destructive gender stereotypes to any reader who does not have a thorough gender theory and research background. At minimum, the authors should revise to protect against the reinforcement of stereotypes. Ideally, they would collect more data and reorganize the analysis.

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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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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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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 limited interest

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.