Reviewer's report

**Title:** Excessive substance use in bipolar disorder is associated with impaired functioning rather than clinical characteristics, a descriptive study

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 23 September 2009

**Reviewer:** Guy Goodwin

**Reviewer's report:**

This is a well conducted systematic cross-sectional clinical study. Its main limitation is size, which limits statistical confidence.

Major concerns.

The authors would help the reader a great deal if they tabulated the literature (in the introduction or discussion) that bears on their main findings - sample size with effect sizes (and direction) for illness intensity, social outcomes, general intelligence. At present the message is - its a mess. This may be true but it doesn't help.

The misuse of substances is extended beyond the usual criterior and all 'excessive' users are analysed. Is it clear that their negative findings vis a vis clinical characteristics are not due to the inclusion of the non-SUD cases.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have plenty of conventional competing interests but none appear to me relevant to the content of this publication.

Non-financial competing interest: I have a minor research network collaboration with one of the authors (OA), which means I would like him to do good work, but does not constitute a close relationship.