Reviewer’s report

Title: Seeking help for depression from family and friends: A qualitative analysis of perceived advantages and disadvantages

Version: 1 Date: 20 May 2011

Reviewer: Ann Crosland

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1. It is unclear how the question about help seeking was worded in the questionnaire i.e. whether it asks them to draw on their experiences in presenting their responses or whether it merely asks them to list what they think are the advantages and disadvantages in a more abstract way. (minor essential revision)

2. In the section entitled ‘participants’ the authors point to the majority of respondents being women but that this is not contextualised in the background, so that the reader is left with insufficient information upon which to judge whether this is important. No further gender comparisons are made in the analysis and yet there when talking about the extent to which family and friends are supportive in cases of depression there is sufficient evident in the literature to suggest that men and women’s experiences and views could well be different. Not least, because women are more likely to experience violence in the family and violence and abuse are known factors in triggering anxiety and depression. In the same section no further information is given about ethnicity of respondents and recent research from a team at the University of Manchester in the UK indicates that the role of family in supporting women is very different for some South Asian communities. (Major compulsory revision)

3. Whilst in the methods the authors refer to using a thematic analysis this seems to be more along the lines of a simple, rather than thematic, content analysis whereby frequency of occurrence is the most important criteria for assessing the importance of a theme. There is not a problem with the way that this approach has been adopted but it would benefit from being described appropriately and also from inclusion of some indication of frequency when referring to how common a response was. (minor compulsory revision)

4. The findings, whilst interesting, would be enriched by more information about differences in who responded in which way i.e. were younger respondents more likely to respond positively than older ones etc. Qualitative analysis should look for patterns and exceptions as well as rules. (major compulsory revision)

5. In the second paragraph of the discussion new interpretations of the data are introduced e.g. when the authors refer to 80% of respondents citing an advantage. This approach is at odds with what is reported previously. (minor essential revision)

6. Much of the discussion is taken over to considering how the findings presented here compare to the recent publication by Vollman et al (2010). The case is not
fully made for what this paper adds to this previous work which treats the subject area in some depth by comparing the responses of depressed and never depressed participants (major compulsory revision)

7. The authors suggest that the findings point to the need for an educational programme for family and friends to help overcome the perceived disadvantages. However, the disadvantages cited by participants such as over-involvement, decreased self-esteem and lack of confidentiality could be factors that have led to the depression in the first place. Providing education for family and friends could not only breach confidentiality but could also have implications for the safety and well-being of people with. A more targeted and sophisticated approach, informed by an exploration of the patterns and differences in responses to the questionnaire, would be more appropriate. (major compulsory revision)

**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.