Reviewer's report

**Title:** Repetition of suicide attempts across episodes of severe depression
Behavioural sensitisation found in suicide group but not in controls

**Version:** 3  **Date:** 4 November 2010

**Reviewer:** Yvonne Bergmans

**Reviewer's report:**

This is an important article for the field of suicidology and I commend the authors for their work. It is truly interesting. There are a few changes which I strongly recommend the authors take into consideration prior to publication.

- **Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)**
  - This may be a cultural/linguistic issue however when we discuss people who die by suicide, we do not identify them as suicide victims rather, they are people who died by suicide. Also, in discussing depression, we identify them as people with depression as opposed to “depressives”

  # abstract. Background. Sentence 1
  # Abstract: Results: 1st para. you use the word “suicides”…is this people who died by suicide?

- The sample, para 2 “A total of 1206 pts received this diagnosis” – depression/melancholia? Please be specific about the diagnosis you are talking about.

- Please take out the word “accomplished” suicide, “death by” would be more appropriate.

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

  o There are a few areas which I would like to suggest require some changes:

    a. please clearly state which/whose definition of suicide, suicide attempts, self harm, (e.g. Silverman et al. 2008; O’Carroll 1996) as the nomenclature you have used is not clear. Although you identify that controls were used on the criterion of diagnosis, gender and age at admission, had any of these controls a history of (using Silverman et al’s nomenclature) suicide-related or self-harm behaviours? Your report on self harm, under course of depression and suicide attempts, paragraph 2 needs to have the definition come earlier in the paper.

    # To use the word “suicides” (Background, para. 5) indicates an action/verb versus a noun-the people who died by suicide.

    # The sample, para. 1 “high number of accomplished suicides”. Please change to deaths by suicide. Also remove the word accomplished in other parts of the paper…to accomplish could be understood as those who do not “accomplish”
then being viewed or viewing themselves as non-accomplished or failures.

# The sample, para. 4 “were monitored up to the death of the suicide”. Please change to time of death (by suicide), so the length of…

b. You discuss the behavioural sensitization and kindling models in relationship to depression, could you please also identify some of the related research in repeated suicide attempts (e.g. Pettit JW, Joiner TE, Rudd MD(2004); Joiner TE (2005); Witte, T.K., Merrill KA, Stellrecht, NE, Bernert, RA, et al. (2007); Van Orden, KA, Witte, TK, Gordon KH et al., (2008). Although there does not appear to be a literature of sensitization on death by suicide, in reviewing these articles, I suspect you will be able to give paragraph 2 under Background some more substance. For instance, you identify the negative thinking patterns arising through behavioural sensitization and yet, how this impacts repeat suicide attempts or death by suicide is left a bit weak. You might also make mention of the Opponent-Process Theory.

c. Under Course of depression and suicide attempts, para. 1- “controls were not monitored after the suicide they matched, and therefore the number of episodes in controls are compared…” suicide=death by suicide?. Also could you indicate whether this means that potentially some of the controls may have died by suicide after the specified study period either in the body of the text or in your limitations.

d. There seems to be a mismatch in your references e.g. Kreitman and Casey referenced Under Course of Depression and Suicide attempts is identified as reference 36 and in the references it is 38 is one example.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests