Reviewer's report

Title: The role of Basic Health Insurance on Depression: An Epidemiological Cohort Study of a randomized Community Sample in Northwest China

Version: 2 Date: 29 November 2011

Reviewer: Juan Li

Reviewer's report:

Given that few studies have explored the correlation between health insurance and mental health, this study aimed to determine how the basic health insurance scheme influences depression with large community-based samples from Northwest China. The conclusion that having no basic health insurance can dramatically increase the risk of depression sounds intriguing.

But I have a number of concerns with this manuscript.

Major Compulsory Revisions

My major concern has to do with the hypothesis of this study. The authors hypothesized that “basic health insurance of China may be a protective factor of depression”, given “the characteristics of Chinese’s somatic expression of depression” (in 1st paragraph of Page 5). A key question here is that the Chinese with depressive symptoms may ONLY express more somatic issues compared with westerners rather than they do have more somatic problems. If so, we would have no reason to believe, in contrast to western studies as what cited in the manuscript (in first paragraph of Page5 ), that the basic health insurance could reduce the risk to develop depression in China.

Rather I suspect “poverty” may be the key underlying factor to explain the relationship between BHIC and depression. Previous population-based epidemiological study (Yu etal, 2011) reported that the depression prevalence is significantly higher in northwestern part of China compared to eastern and northern parts, as the living conditions and economy development were much worse in the northwestern region. So even only having basic health insurance may mean a lot to the local residents, and in turn reduce the risk for them to develop into depression.

A related question is that socioeconomic status may be an important confounding factor in the relationship between health insurance and depression. Though health insurance status was still a significant predictor for depression development after controlling for Dibao, SES could be reflected in more valid variables such as monthly income, occupation etc, and unfortunately these presumably more valid factors were not considered and controlled in this study.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. In the bottom paragraph of Page3, “the somatic expression of depression
encourage patients with mood disorders to seek support from primary healthcare professionals, rather than mental health professionals, as the service provided by the former is covered by the Basic Health Insurance of China”. Does this imply that the service operated by mental health professionals is NOT covered by BHIC? Or it depends?

2. P4 “Many studies have shown that access to health insurance improves health status”, suggest to add “physical” before “health status”.

3. In Method section, the three-stage cluster sampling needs more elaboration.

4. Language editing by a native English speaker is strongly recommended. The following are just a couple of examples of language issues, which are far from complete:

1). “Family events” better replace by “life events” (Page 10)

2).“Graduate students with their concentration as social science” replaced by “with their major as...” (Page 11).

3).“ to ask ..for revision” replaced “for correction” (page 11).

5. I call for a more focused discussion on the present results with comparison with previous literatures. The current discussion appears too dispersed, and not specific enough.

6. In table 1, though the caption says that “Baseline and two follow-up surveys…”, there was no baseline data at all;

The numbers listed in table 1 was not consistent with what shown in text, for example, the numbers for the item of “education”.

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

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

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests