Reviewer's report

Title: 'I am not a depressed person': How identity conflict affects help-seeking rates for Major Depressive Disorder

Version: 1 Date: 30 July 2012

Reviewer: Siow Ann Chong

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The objectives of the research are well-defined. Ethical process has been followed, the reviewer would, however, like to know whether any information brochure, help-lines or referrals were provided to those who had never sought help (there were 3 such participants in the study).

The participant recruitment is clearly explained in the manuscript where advertisement for recruitment in various portals and screening with PHQ-9 followed by use of SCID were employed to select participants for the study. Authors could explain further why they did not use additional purposive approach to ensure similar number of men and women (17 women were included while only 3 men participated). It would be also important to know how many of the participants had help-seeking delays of more than 10 years for their last depressive episode. The range of 2 weeks to 30 years is quite broad, recall delays are expected for those with a long delay, particularly those with a delay of 30 years.

The authors chose a qualitative approach to identify the psychological factors affecting help-seeking among depressed individuals. Individual semi-structured interviews were employed for data collection. The process of constant comparison adds further depth and breadth to the qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of employing constant comparisons for identifying and closing gaps along with data collection. Authors could explain their process of comparison and iterative modification briefly to demonstrate the robustness of data collection.

Results are presented clearly and are interesting to read. The chronological process of identity issues to acceptance and the influence of cost-benefit balance is well-presented. The distinction between identify and goals is, however, not very clear. How was ‘goal attainment’ or ‘goal theory’ embedded in the analysis? How was it linked to ‘identify’ by the participants? Some verbatim sentences could add more value in understanding this.

Authors state that good social support or networks were not identified as important predictors of help-seeking in their group of participants. A comment on whether this was seen more or less among those belonging to a certain age group would be helpful. Considerable literature suggests the role of social support in identifying the change in mood and reducing delays in help-seeking.
Consequently several interventions among parents and peers have also been implemented with the objective to identify and support those in need of care. Authors should address this lack of relevance of social support in their study in the discussion. Was this identified during the constant comparison process? If yes, were any probes included in the interview schedule? Or was it not of interest since the help-seeking pathways were being explored from the individual’s psychological perspective?

Limitations of the study have been addressed adequately. Another limitation that may be added is the use of semi-structured interviews instead of in-depth interviewing that are more spontaneous and more effective in understanding the individuals’ view of an event, their terminology and judgments.

A minor observation is a possible typographical error in a sentence (Pg 9, ‘A small number of participants who failed to notice their symptoms were abnormal experienced extended help-seeking delays’), which should be corrected.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.