Reviewer's report

Title: Emotional but not physical maltreatment is independently related to psychopathology in socially anxious subjects: a web-based Internet survey

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Reviewer: Peter Cooper

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This paper reports a study which examined the association between physical and emotional maltreatment (parental and peer) and social anxiety. They recruited their sample via the web and participants filled in several questionnaires. (There are serious limitations associated with such a sampling strategy, but these the authors consider satisfactorily in their discussion). Regression and mediation analyses revealed that parental emotional maltreatment and emotional peer victimization were independently related to social anxiety and mediated the impact of physical and sexual maltreatment on social anxiety. The authors conclude that ‘social anxiety symptoms are mainly predicted by emotional rather than physical or sexual types of victimization’.

The study is clearly reported, although the fact that the paper was not written by a native English speaker does account for several inelegancies. The manuscript would benefit enormously from a careful editing. (e.g. “For the relationship between neglect or abuse and social phobia and psychopathology we found significant correlations on all subtypes of the CTQ and the event-list (see Table 2). However, the correlations between the emotional subscales and social phobia and psychopathology were found to be higher”. A few minutes of editing could improve this considerably).

There is some confusion over the regressions. We are told “...the physical maltreatment sum-score did not achieve significance on the SPS”. And in the next paragraph we are told “To investigate whether the association of physical maltreatment with the SPS is mediated by emotional maltreatment we conducted a test for simple mediation”. The confusion is, I think, between the regression and the correlations table. In any event, this requires some clarification.

This paper is of interest and probably should be published. The problem I have with it is that the authors assiduously review a large body of data which already attests to the veracity of their central findings - so what the current study adds to existing knowledge is never made clear. Indeed, rather less genuflection to the earlier literature might help the cause of this paper. That is, rather than detailing the findings of each and every study, a general conclusion about the current state of knowledge, together with highlighting the gaps, which this paper sets out to address, would make clear the contribution to the field of this study.