Reviewer's report

Title: The Association Between Social Relationships and Self-Harm: A Case-control Study

Version: 2 Date: 18 December 2012

Reviewer: Sarah E Knowles

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Major Compulsory Revisions

Use of English in the some of the revised sections is poor in terms of grammatical errors and sentence construction. I would recommend a thorough proof reading.

I appreciate the inclusion of a theoretical model (Berkman) although I think linking the results to a model of self harm specifically may be more appropriate. For the example, the Cry of Pain model (Williams 2001) includes social rejection as a risk factor and social support as a protective intervening factor and would be relevent here. The decision to use Berkman is also odd given that in their comments to reviewers, the authors state an international comparison is beyond the scope of the study, but Berkman's model is specifically concerned with wider culture and society. It may help to specify whether the authors view their study as relating to the micro, psycho-social mechanisms of the model.

p10 - Please state exactly which measures were controlled for as covariates and also whether adding this number of covariates has any implications for power.

Minor Essential Revisions

p4 The authors state "Given that risk factors for suicide have not been found to generalize necessarily to self-harm [5], further research is needed" - however there is no reference provided that social networks are a known risk factor for suicide either?

p9 "We recorded the participants’ diagnosed medical illness from a list." This is too vague - does 'a list' refer to hospital records, a self report form?

p12 IThe authors state "we controlled for a range of potential confounders including measures of physical and mental health" but there appears to have been only one measure each of physical and mental health included and it is not clear in the paper why these are particularly important as confounds. Can the authors reference studies showing the importance of physical health conditions and depression to self harm, to justify why controlling for these strenghhtens the analysis?

Discussion - I do think that the authors are over reaching from the data, which is a cross sectional, descriptive study, to suggesting interventions. I would prefer to
see more discussion of how the findings relate back to theoretical models (though some discussion of this is now included) and what this leads to in terms of further research (for example, longitudinal studies to overcome the limitations of case control designs). On other issues such as measurement I think there is appropriate discussion of the limitations.

**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:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests