Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 2 Date: 14 January 2013

Reviewer: Kerri Clough-Gorr

Reviewer’s report:

The authors have made considerable changes since the original draft. In my opinion, however, it still requires major revisions. Some (not all) of which are summarize below. I would strongly recommend the authors ask a senior investigator with lots of scientific peer-reviewed publications to help restructure/edit the manuscript.

Major Compulsory Revisions

It seems the aim of the study is to consider social factors in relation to self harm (SH) specifically in an Asian setting. Perhaps the title should indicate this.

The abstract neglects to mention the primary outcome.

There is still confusion about the definition of SH & suicide. Introduction sentences 2 and 3 are inconsistent. First sentence says SH includes failed suicides and second implies otherwise.

The methods section is still poorly structured, lacks information and information is mixed up between sections (see previous review regarding Strobe criteria). For example, the section on study population (participants) should include all information about inclusion/exclusion criteria. There is an entire paragraph describing life events which are not used in the analyses. The analytic methods are never explained (see previous review). Variables lack proper explanation/operationalization (see Strobe criteria). For example what diseases were on the list? Did it include severity? Why where those diseases chosen? Aim of the study shows up under methods-measurements instead of introduction. What was criteria for including variables for adjustment? Etc.

The results are very limited and text pithy compared to other sections. Authors redundantly state that logistic regression was used (2 times in methods, once misplaced in results). Text only provides descriptive info for cases. Perhaps inverse association would be more accurate than negative. The lack of results gives the impression that the study is too small an advance to publish.

The discussion remains too long and unfocused. Completely out of proportion with stated results. The discussion does not succinctly/logically explain how the research constitutes a useful contribution to the field.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest
Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests