Reviewer's report

Title: Coping, Adaptation, and Perceived Risk to Children: A Survey of Parents Affected with Bipolar Disorder

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Reviewer: Anne Duffy

Reviewer's report:

This paper describes the findings from a cross-sectional study of self-identified adults with bipolar disorder who have at least one unaffected child up to age 30 years. The study sought to investigate the association between coping mechanisms in affected parents and their perceived adaptation and the perceived risk to children. A survey was self-administered online to interested self-identified patients who learned of the survey through advertisements. The topic, that of psychological constructs related to illness and other outcomes including adaptation is important. The investigation of affected parent to child perceptions and associations is novel and relevant.

This manuscript would be improved with more concise writing – for example the Background section is not focused specifically on the research question and it is not clear when reading through it where it is heading. The methods are weak given that a selection bias (those who want to fill out the survey) is in operation likely. Also you have no way of confirming that the respondents have the disorder you are studying. There is essentially no objective measures and no detail regarding the clinical course which would directly influence the perceptions of coping and adaptation (ie psychotic features? Quality of remission? ).

Specific comments:

Background:

A recent meta-analysis estimated that the heritability of bipolar disorder is estimated at 85% (Bienvenu et al.). Furthermore there are more relevant references to show that the birthrate in families with a parent with bipolar disorder is close to that of the general population.

The research question was not succinctly asked in such a way that it directly mapped on to an analytic approach.

Methods:

There should be much more detail collected to characterize the illness course and current clinical state for interpretation.

Statistical Analysis:

The mediation hypothesis should be explicitly stated. Furthermore, age of the
offspring would likely affect the perception of risk (ie if younger increased, if older and well decreased). Furthermore, the nature of the parent illness would affect the perception and the lack of detail on this limit any analysis or conclusions.

Results:

The majority of patients endorsed a perceived genetic/familial aspect to their illness and the vast majority (87%) endorsed a greater perceived risk to children – therefore the main finding seems that patients are knowledgeable about the heritability of this disorder. Also with little variation in perceived risk it is curious how this can have a differential affect on coping?

Conclusions:

The main conclusion here seems to be that patients (assuming they have bipolar disorder) seem to be well aware of the familial/genetic component and those that endorse better adaptation, tend to endorse social coping and a positive outlook – however, this is not really new and not really informative regarding the important and interesting psychological associations between parents and children.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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