Reviewer's report

Title: Validation of the Multi-dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and the relationship between social support, intimate partner violence and antenatal depression in Malawi.

Version: 1
Date: 13 March 2014
Reviewer: Masumi Iida

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript examined the association between perceived social support and antenatal depression and investigated the role of intimate partner violence as a potential moderator of this association among pregnant women in Malawi. One of the major goals of the study was to translate and validate the measure of perceived social support (Multi-dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support; MSPSS) into two local languages (Chichewa and Chiyao). The translation process was rigorous, and it was impressive that the authors were able to have 581 women respond to the translated MSPSS. There are number of strengths to this study, such as large sample size and innovative research question, but there are several issues that deserve authors' careful attention.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. I found the MSPSS items for significant other to be a little confusing. In these items, the significant others is translated as the “special person”, but does the “special person” mean intimate partner in this culture? Or is it possible that it could be their best friend or a close family member?

2. I found the significant interaction effect of MSPSS significant other score by intimate partner violence to be interesting. However, are the significant other in MSPSS and the person causing intimate partner violence the same person? Or is it possible that they are different people? It is hard to imagine that someone who is abusive to one’s partner could also be a source of support for that person.

3. To disentangle the interaction findings, the authors ran two separate logistic regression analyses, one for the group who had not experienced partner violence and one for the group that had experienced partner violence. This approach is less than optimal since there is significant decrease in power. My recommendation is to get the simple slope of MSPSS significant other using the whole sample. To get the simple slope for the group who had not experienced partner violence, create a variable where 0 = “had not experienced partner violence” and 1 = “had partner violence”, then include the interaction term (this variable by MSPSS significant other). The estimate of the main effect of the MSPSS significant other will be the coefficient for the group that had not experienced partner violence. To get the simple slope for the group who had experienced partner violence, create a variable where 0 = “had experienced partner violence” and 1 = “had not experienced partner violence”. Again, include
the interaction term, and the estimate of the main effect of MSPSS significant other will be the coefficient for the group that had experienced partner violence.

4. How was the major depressive episode determined? It is stated that 503 women were recruited on the days when SCID interviews were done, but only 196 were interviewed using SCID. At first, I thought SCID was used to measure the major depressive episode, but that seems not to be the case. Is there a cut-off score for SRQ to determine major depressive episode?

Minor Essential Revisions

1. In general, I will be careful with the term “social support”. There are several different conceptualization of social support (e.g., enacted social support, perceived social support). In this paper, the authors are examining perceived social support, so I will make that clear in their introduction and discussion.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.