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: Date: 18 March 2014

Reviewer: Brian Lakey

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Review of “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.”

This paper addresses two worthwhile questions: predictors of antenatal depression in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the cross-cultural generality of basic findings for perceived social support. I am more interested cross-cultural generality.

The research is generally well-done and I think it makes a worthwhile contribution. My primary question is whether the novelty of the findings cross the bar for this particular journal.

To strengthen the paper, I recommend increasing the focus on novel findings and decreasing the focus on links between depression and perceived support that have been reported previously.

As the authors indicate, the links between perceived support and depression in this sample have already been reported by this team. What is new in the current report is that each perceived support subscale was included in analyses. Given that these subscales are likely very highly correlated (we need the correlation matrix to be sure), I’m not sure how important these findings are. My guess is that most of the link between each of the perceived support subscales and depression reflects shared rather than unique variance. The manuscript could be improved if such analyses were reported. The introduction and discussion would need to be modified to focus on incremental validity of subscales beyond generic perceived support. As a minor point, I would like to see the perceived support measure reverse scored so that high scores indicate the absence of perceived support. This would make the odds ratios for perceived support easier to interpret as higher scores would indicate greater risk for depression. An odds ratio of 2.0 is easier to interpret than an odds ratio less than 1, in my opinion.

The most novel findings reported involve the psychometrics of a perceived support scale. I believe the manuscript could be strengthened by focusing on these findings. Confirmatory factor analyses would be more convincing than principle components. I believe the authors have the sample size for CFA if the entire sample were used.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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.