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: 19 March 2014

Reviewer: Stephen Z Levine

Reviewer's report:

Despite my remarks this is reasonable work that requires some changes prior to acceptance. I hope the authors find this feedback constructive-

1. In the introduction, provide epidemiological estimates of the prevalence of depression in the antenatal period to strengthen the case.
2. This requires qualification “Most of these studies found that the MSPSS showed adequate test characteristics”. Namely, provide reliability and validity information.
3. The method states “designed to measure the respondent’s perception”. But in the introduction the scale is described as providing 3 rater sources. That seems inconsistent.
4. The authors describe the translation process by Rahman et al was used (that seems very rigorous) yet many translation processes are available. Please justify this choice of translation method.
5. The authors used the “Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale” – was antenatal / postnatal depression assessed – the introduction implies antenatal but the Edinburgh is a postnatal measure.
6. Little’s chi-square value for missing values should be used & reported (it’s in the version of SPSS used by the team.
7. Why was Varimax implemented not Promax? Eigenvalues over 1 is inadequate to choose factors – try an alternative. Confirmatory factor analysis (perhaps an exploratory then validation of a different sample approach) would be superior and more appropriate than the current analysis. Use competing models (correlated and uncorrelated as well as with a general factor at the apex).
8. Paragraph being “SRQ total score” – rs are not presented e.g. “(-0.210, p<0.001)”
9. All loadings in Table 2 are required. The item meanings are unclear (are these methodological-factors reflecting the source of rater?)

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

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.
Declaration of competing interests:

I have received research support, and/or consultancy fees and/or travel support from Shire, F. Hoffmann-La Roche and Eli Lilly