Reviewer's report

Title: Lowering of self-esteem mediates the association between social phobia and depression in middle adolescence. A two-year follow-up of a prospective population cohort study.

Version: 2 Date: 20 January 2014

Reviewer: Brooke Kauffman

Reviewer's report:

This article presents notable information about the mediation of self esteem in adolescent populations with depression and social phobia and its prediction of development of succeeding disorders (social phobia or depression). The report also aims to explore the relationship between self esteem, gender, social phobia, depression and comorbid disorder. This study examined adolescents amongst two cities by administering the Finnish modification of the Beck Depression Inventory (RBDI) to assess for depression, the Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) to identify participants with social phobia and a Finnish translation of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used to measure self esteem. Data was collected at T1 and eligible participants at T1 were asked to participate at a 2 year follow up (T2). A variety of methods were offered to obtain the data from the participants including, in class supervised survey, postal survey and internet survey. The authors’ predictions are justified by their findings in that it appears lowering of self-esteem does in fact mediate depression in boys with earlier social phobia without depression and subsequent social phobia and girls with early depression without social phobia and subsequent social phobia. In a cross-sectional analysis, low self-esteem at both the age of 15 and at the age of 17 was associated with social phobia, depression and comorbid disorders with comorbid disorders having the strongest association. Boys were also found to have higher self esteem than girls in populations that had neither disorder however the same did not hold true for boys suffering from depression without social phobia at 15 and 17, comorbid depression and social phobia at 15 and social phobia without depression at age 17.

Discretionary Revisions

1. The title does not address the gender differences presented in this report. It appears as though gender plays a significant role in these findings and should be considered to be represented more so in the title.

2. In the abstract results section does not clearly state if both associations were looked at for both genders or if early social phobia without depression in males or if early depression without social phobia in females were solely being examined. More information could be presented here.

3. A limitation to be considered would be the different methods used to obtain the information from the participants. Perhaps students who took the measures at
home from the internet or postal service were more likely to report accurate results than those in a supervised setting.

Minor Essential Revisions
4. The third and fourth paragraph under the results section mentions “Figure 2” but I believe the figure at the end of the article is mislabeled as “Figure 3.”

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.