Reviewer's report

Title: Health service use among individuals with illegal drug use disorders: the role of comorbid common psychiatric disorders.

Version: 1 Date: 5 June 2013

Reviewer: Patrick McCabe

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1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The question of whether comorbid mood and/or anxiety disorders are associated with substance use disorder treatment is an important and interesting one. The author should state explicitly that the outcome under study is substance use disorder treatment as opposed to health services use (in title, abstract and text). This will limit potential confusion in the reader.

The authors state (Study Outcomes paragraph 1) that “Individuals, who did not receive treatment, were asked about their perceived unmet need for treatment” and this is correct but implies that those who did receive services were not asked this same question, which they were. The analysis is cross-sectional using responses about lifetime events and perceived unmet need for substance use disorder treatment is seen among those who have also received substance use disorder treatment. This will need to be fixed (Major Compulsory Revision).

The paper would be considerably stronger if the authors took advantage of the longitudinal nature of the dataset and explored factors that predicted initiation and/or maintenance of substance use treatment including mood and anxiety disorders. If a cross-sectional analysis is used I would recommend only using wave 1 as it has a larger sample size.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
I would recommend including prescription drug abuse/dependence as it was assessed as use outside the scope of prescribed medical use (i.e. illegal use).

Clarification on variance estimation is needed. The authors note (Statistical analysis paragraph 3) that the analysis was “weighted to account for sampling design”. Were other design features (psu and stratum) used? Was the subpopulation nature of the sample taken into account in the variance estimation? What variance estimation technique was used? Why the choice of reporting unweighted means in Table 2?

3. Are the data sound?
Yes, with limitation as noted below (Grucza et al).

4. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes.

It should be noted that some of the more important limitations would be mitigated...
in a longitudinal analysis. Also data on posttraumatic stress disorder, psychosis (psychotic episode or schizophrenia), and personality disorders are available in the dataset (Limitations and strengths paragraph 1). The Authors may want to acknowledge that the studies data on illegal substance use was collected by federal employees likely suppressing substance use reporting:


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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.