Reviewer's report

Title: The influence of age on the female/male ratio of treated incidence rates in depression

Authors:

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Reviewer: Anthony Jorm

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after revision, which I do not need to see

The strengths of this study are the large sample of cases and the use of incident rather than prevalent cases. The major weakness is that the differences found could reflect referral patterns rather than true incidence patterns. The authors adequately acknowledge this weakness.

The following major points need attention:
1. The study uses a mix of depressive diagnoses including manic-depressive. However, bipolar disorder generally shows no sex difference in occurrence. The age-specific pattern of sex difference could be affected by the mix of bipolar versus other depressions. Data need to be reported on the mixture of diagnoses at each age and for each sex.
2. A reference needs to be added to the important paper by Bebbington et al. (Psychol Med, 1998, 28, 9-19) which covers the same territory.
3. The age group differences could be cohort rather than aging effects because the data are cross-sectional. This needs brief acknowledgement. The authors also need to acknowledge that the data are 30 years old and psychosocial effects could change, e.g. the impact of being unemployed or of staying home to look after
4. Explanations of the findings as psychosocial or biological in origin are not mutually exclusive. The discussions on the top of p. 13 and the middle of p. 14 tend to assume they are. It is possible that there is a tendency for an inverted U because of hormonal variation, but this could be reversed by psychosocial factors like the greater impact of unemployment on men.

Minor points
1. It is not clear to me what is meant by “interpolated corrections for marginal means in the age distribution were employed” (p. 2 and p. 6).
2. It would be more appropriate to use past tense in reporting results, particularly as the data are 30 years old.
3. In the Abstract, the following sentence needs an addition about the sex ratios at the other ages: "This pattern is crucially influenced by the group of married persons, which shows a sex-ratio of 3:1 between the age of 30-50." I would suggest something along the lines of: "..., but ratios of around 1:1 at younger and older ages."
4. On page 3, “Epidemiological Catchment Area” should be “Epidemiologic Catchment Area”.
5. English-style decimal conventions need to be used, e.g. 5.5 rather than 5,5 and 100,000 rather than 100.000.
6. On page 9, a zero is missing from one of the denominators, viz. 50/100.00.
7. The x-axes on the graphs do not need to go as high as 100 years. 80 would be enough.
8. The Figures which give CIs need to make clear in their captions that the light lines are upper and lower CIs.
9. The English is quite comprehensible, but is sometimes awkward and needs some editing.

Competing interests:
None declared.