Reviewer's report

Title: 3500 Cases of Suicide: A Systematic Review

Version: 1 Date: 30 June 2004

Reviewer: Ellen Townsend

Reviewer's report:

General

By investigating psychiatric disorders in 3500 suicides the authors address a very important issue, not least because some of these studies demonstrate that such disorders may be inadequately treated in those who commit suicide (eg. Hawton et al 1999). In this meta-analytic study the authors pooled data in order to examine gender and geographical differences, as these are important factors to consider in suicide research. Appropriate methods are used, however, I would question whether the review is really systematic – in the sense of what a Cochrane systematic review entails. For example, in this study there was no hand searching of key journals, no quality assessment, no sensitivity analysis and no attempt to contact authors for additional data. Thus, I think that it would more suitable to call the paper “Psychiatric disorders in 3500 cases of suicide: A meta-analysis”, instead (as that is what it is).

-- Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached) --

Change title to: “Psychiatric disorders in 3500 cases of suicide: A meta-analysis”

Add a column to Table 1 to include data relating to the proportion of participants with/without a diagnosis in each study.

-- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct) --

p. 8-9. Use of ‘SD’. Do the authors mean standard deviation, if so this should be noted and these should be presented in brackets.

p.5. 2nd line – needs grammatical revision (change ‘were’ to was.)

-- Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore) --

A more considered discussion of the geographical findings would be desirable, at the moment it is somewhat descriptive. For example, the authors may wish to note that the geographical differences may be, to some extent, explained by cultural differences. The authors may also wish to ‘set-up’ their findings by expanding on existing knowledge in this area in the introduction (eg. in the last paragraph on page 3).

Consider doing a sensitivity analysis to see if studies that differ methodologically influence the overall effect sizes (some variation in studies is recognised as a limitation of the study on p14).
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None.