Reviewer's report

Title: Psychometric properties and clinical utility of the Scale for Suicidal Ideation (SSI) in an adolescent outpatient population

Version: 1 Date: 7 January 2005

Reviewer: Wesley D Allan

Reviewer's report:

General: The article is generally well-written and concerns an important topic, the assessment of adolescent suicidality. As the authors mention, a paucity of tools for adolescent suicidality exists, despite the relative frequency of this problem. The authors have also selected a reasonably thorough process to evaluate the psychometric properties of the SSI, which is to be commended. Nevertheless, a few issues should be addressed, mostly related to the concurrent validity sections of the paper.

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

None noted.

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

1) The K-SADS-PL and the SSI were completed by the same clinician, which is a weaker test of concurrent validity than correlating measures completed by separate reporters. Although the SSI was designed to be completed following an interview, the SSI scores in the study are wholly reliant on youngsters' responses on the K-SADS. The authors should justify more carefully how this procedure assesses concurrent validity, or note this as a limitation.

2) On a related note, the CSA was completed by clinicians at the beginning of treatment. How long was the time period between the administration of the SSI and the completion of the CSA? Obviously, a lengthy gap would further weaken the evidence for concurrent validity.

3) The authors report significant overall chi-square scores for the classes derived from the K-SADS. However, they do not seem to have tested which of the specific classes were significantly different from each other, although they later mention these differences in the Discussion.

4) Finally, the authors correctly mention in the Limitations section that computing inter-rater and test-retest reliabilities would have helped more fully evaluate the psychometric properties of the SSI. However, later in the sentence, they assert that the "high alpha-coefficients suggest a good internal consistency suggesting good reliability." Indeed, the alpha coefficients are a marker of internal consistency, but internal consistency is just one indicator of reliability; the authors should temper that statement, particularly given the fluid nature of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
1) The title is a bit misleading, as some analyses use the total sample, which also includes youngsters from a community sample.

2) The notations and formatting are sometimes a bit confusing, particularly in the results section.

3) The description of the measures is generally good; however, the cutoff threshold of "5/6" mentioned for the SSI is confusing. Do the authors mean "5 or 6"?

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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