Reviewer’s report

Title: The Foxconn suicides and media prominence: Is the Werther effect applicable in China?

Version: 1 Date: 26 August 2011

Reviewer: Keith Hawton

Reviewer’s report:

Here is my assessment of this paper:

This paper reports a sophisticated study of a series of suicides in China, the latter having attracted international attention. The investigation of the relationship between media reporting, internet searching and the occurrence of suicides is very useful and will be of interest to a range of readers. However, the report needs a good of attention to make it suitable for publication. Also, I suggest that a statistical expert reviewer is needed as the statistical analyses are highly sophisticated and assessment of them is well beyond my range of knowledge.

The paper as it stands is too long, especially the Discussion which goes well beyond the evidence. It think the authors should try and focus more on the main points and present relatively simple messages that will be understood by the general reader of a public health journal. Thus I think the Discussion could be shortened by at least 30 - 40% of its current length. Also, attention needs to be paid to the grammar. If necessary, the authors might ask a native English speaking colleague to assist them.

The following are some specific comments:

Results
While the numbers of suicides and the methods used are presented in an appendix table it would be helpful for the reader to have a summary of these data, either at the beginning of the Results section or in the Introduction. Probably putting these in the Introduction would be best as this would make it clear why the search terms "jump" and "cut" were used.

Page 10, last line should include "2009".

Page 11, example of where the grammar could be improved is in the first paragraph, where "effect" should be "effects" and "was" should be "were" (this is just one example of many). Similarly, in the second paragraph "discovered" would be more appropriately expressed as "showed".

Page 12, other examples of lack of clarity are in the first whole paragraph, third line, beginning "Suicide occurrence reported...." and in the fourth -sixth lines of the last paragraph.

Page 13, it is unclear why the sub-heading includes "on"
The authors should be cautious about using the term "the scandal" - this is rather
The reader will not be clear what the Papageno Effect means; this needs explaining.

Page 14, the second part of the sentence in the middle paragraph on this page is unclear.

Figure 1, it is pretty impossible to read the dates on the figure.

Figure 4, I am unclear why data on newspaper reporting have been combined with internet searches in this figure. This requires explanation or alteration.

My overall conclusion is that this paper will be of interest readers but that it requires considerable work on the clarity of the messages and on the grammar. I would also suggest that the authors might consider being a little more cautious in the way they report political influences on newspaper reporting. While these are important and should be mentioned, they might be toned down a little.

Finally, as noted above, shortening of the paper should improve its clarity.