Reviewer's report

Title: School difficulties and role of social, material, behavioural, physical and mental resources among multi-cultural students

Version: 4 Date: 10 April 2012

Reviewer: Lars Lien

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Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

None

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

Title: difficult to read and do not really cover the aim of the article which is ethnic differences.
The background chapter is very difficult to read, partly because you get the feeling that the text is translated, esp the first para.
Correlation analysis between the outcome and unhealthy behavior variables should be performed.
Table 3 mid column second line has an error.

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

There is mixing of terms like covariates, risk factors and mediators. This should be cleared since different ways of analysis will be used. According to the interpretation of the analysis all variables (except outcome and exposure (ethnicity)) are treated as mediators. I will doubt if that is correct and would think that most of the variables might also be confounders. A more serious analysis of this should be reflected in the method section.
In the material and methods section there is too little on the material and some of which is described in the results (first para) should be moved to the material. We need to know much more about the different schools. How many of non-Europeans went to private school?
There is also a need of more info on the different instruments. Have they been validated among adolescents and are they reliable for this study. Also here there is need to move text from the discussion part to the method section. I would strongly urge the authors to collapse some of the instruments used like family structure and fathers’ occupation. There are sometimes around five subjects in each cell making the CI wide and uncertainty high. In addition some pupils might the able to trace risking the anonymity.
I would also ask to gut down on number of outcome variables. Quitting school
thinking is unreliable and very few in the two ethnic groups do have answered yes to that question.

One fundamental problem is the lack of interaction analysis on gender. According to analysis in table 3 girls and boys had very different results on the outcome measures and if there were interactions the results should be analyzed separately for boys and girls.

Another fundamental problem is lack of information and controlling for school or class variables. If like in other countries ethnic groups tend to be in the same class this might have been a very important confounding variable. This should at least have been discussed.

Also the grouping of ethnicity should be discussed. Is it really possible to treat all non Europeans in one group? Are they similar?