Author's response to reviews

Title: Suicide Prevention for Youth - A Mental Health Awareness Program: Lessons learned from the Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe (SEYLE) intervention study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Reviewers,

Thank you very much for your valuable and very helpful comments to the manuscript. We have reviewed each comment carefully and responded accordingly. In this letter you will find point-by-point answers to the queries. All changes described in this letter are highlighted in bold in the enclosed manuscript. Any additional changes are also bolded in the attached manuscript.

With Kind Regards,

Camilla Wasserman

1) **Reviewer 1** suggested grouping the responses of the Awareness coordinators in a more formalised way. Acting in accordance with this recommendation, we believe that the quality of the paper has improved, as the reader will now gain a better understanding of the responses. By and large, the aim of qualitative research is not to present statistics, but we have in the manuscript merged the broad meaningful themes and present them in text form as well as in three new figures (text and figures 3, 4 and 5 on pages 16, 20-21 and 24). In line with the nature of the results, we only show the frequency of the data, since no other statistical analyses were performed.

Below, we address **Reviewer 2**’s suggestions in how to improve the manuscript.

2) **Major compulsory revision:**
As suggested by the reviewer the data analysis procedures are now described in detail on pages 14-15.

3) **Minor essential revisions:**
Reviewer 2 brings attention to the cross-country asymmetrical gender distribution in the Awareness Intervention Program and the reasons for this. The sample asymmetry is of course very important and the SEYLE consortium has prepared a manuscript, currently under review, that describes the recruited sample, the randomisation procedure and the methodological issues encountered during the SEYLE project. The fact that more girls in Slovenia and more boys in Israel were recruited to the Awareness arm, depends on the outcome of the strict randomisation process which is described in detail in point 6 below. Upon revision of the current manuscript, we have come to the conclusion that including the table describing the sample by country is not relevant for a paper that is a qualitative description of the field staff’s experiences with the Awareness program. In fact, we believe that this particular table would be misleading and confusing for the reader, which is why we decided to remove table 1 from the manuscript.

4) **Methodological limitations of the paper:**
As suggested by the reviewer, the drawback of using free-text answers has been added to the limitation section of the paper on page 29.

5) As indicated by the reviewer, we corrected the reference (p. 34) and affiliation (p. 1) mistakes.

6) Recruitment of pupils:

We did not include extensive information regarding recruitment and randomisation procedures, since we do not believe these to be relevant to the manuscript. The randomisation procedures have previously been described in detail in this journal (Wasserman 2010, see references) and the randomisation procedures are described in the methodological manuscript under review (Carli et al. 2012, see references). In order for the reviewer to get a better understanding of these procedures, we insert a paragraph below regarding the recruitment and randomisation from the latter manuscript:

At each site, eligible schools were randomly selected to participate in SEYLE. Schools were considered eligible if they were public, non-specialized, contained at least forty 15-year-old pupils, had more than two teachers for pupils 15 years of age and no more than 60% of the pupils were of the same gender. A list containing all available schools was generated at each site, and the schools were categorized as large or small and randomized into one of the four study arms for possible inclusion according to a randomized order. Schools were categorized as small if they had less than or equal to the median number of students in all schools in the study area/region; and large if they had greater than the median number of students in all schools in the study area/region. National and/or regional school authorities were contacted and informed, in general about the project in order to get approval, which was obtained in all participating countries. Representatives of SEYLE at each study site then met with the school principals in the respective areas to describe the intervention of the Arm to which their school had been randomized and to explain the general objectives and procedures of that Arm. Each school was selected to participate exclusively in one Arm only and no information was disclosed about the interventions to be performed in other Arms of the RCT. On the basis of this information about SEYLE objectives about the intervention Arm into which the school was randomized, the school could accept or refuse to join. When a school refused to participate, the next school randomized in the same category was approached to replace it. This procedure was designed to generate a balanced number of large and small schools in each intervention Arm, to minimize bias and increase the validity of the results. Within each school, the classes with the largest number of 15-year olds were approached for participant recruitment, with a minimum of two schools per Arm. This procedure was repeated until a minimum of 250 students were recruited in a each Arm. Prior to requesting consent from the parents and assent from the pupils, general information about the SEYLE study and details about the specific Arm they were invited to participate in was provided.

A total of 264 schools were approached for participation. Of these, 179 schools accepted, with an overall response rate of 67.8%. However, the school response rate was 72% when Israel, the only study site to have a low response rate (37.5%), was excluded.

If the editor and reviewer deem it necessary, we can also insert the above information in the current manuscript.
6) Procedures manual:
The translation of the SEYLE procedures manual was not mandatory across the sites, since the majority of the SEYLE researchers and staff were proficient in English. Site-visits to all countries were performed by the SEYLE steering group to ensure that the protocol was understood and followed in detail. All materials that were distributed to students were translated and back-translated and culturally adapted when needed (see page 9). However, the procedures manual was only translated in a few sites and according to the same procedures as for the rest of the materials. We indicate in the references which sites translated the manual (see reference 21).

Thank you to both reviewers for your comments and we hope that you approve of our effort to improve the manuscript accordingly.