Reviewer's report

Title: "The association between stressful life events and depressive symptoms among Cypriot university students: a cross-sectional descriptive correlational study"

Version: 2 Date: 3 August 2013

Reviewer: Daniel Johnson

Reviewer's report:

I feel the authors thoroughly addressed the concerns raised by myself and the other reviewers and the paper is stronger as a result. I have only a few additional revisions, most of which are discretionary. One more general comment is that the additions to the paper make the manuscript lengthy in some places. I realize many of these additions are a direct result of my and the other reviewers’ suggestions, so I have suggested a few places to cut down on text while retaining the content we felt should be included. Otherwise, I have no additional revisions or suggestions. Thank you again for the opportunity to review this manuscript, which I think will be of interest to readers of BMC Public Health.

1. Major Revisions
I have no major revisions.

2. Minor Revisions
a) Please review the places where you write “clinically significant depressive symptoms”. In some places you write “severe clinically significant depressive symptoms” which is not accurate, given that not everyone above 22 on the CESD has severe symptomology. Also, I would not add “(Major Depression)” after “clinically significant depressive symptoms” which you do in some places, because major depression implies a diagnosis of major depressive disorder, which the CESD cannot provide. In the Results section, there is also a spot where you write “mild to moderate depressive clinically significant symptoms” which must be a typo. Please revise.

b) In general, your additions to the text address the reviewers’ requests and enhance the paper. However, in a few places they are quite lengthy and make sections of the manuscript cumbersome. Two suggestions to reduce some text:
- Discussion section- The section on stress generation, although informative, seems a bit removed from the crux of your paper. While I definitely think you need to discuss stress generation, you can cut this section considerably, focusing on reviewing the stress generation literature that is most relevant to your paper and removing the rest. From my perspective, the main reason to include this topic is to acknowledge the limitation of your cross-sectional study (can't speak to directionality) and to put your results in the context of the stress-depression literature, which includes stress exposure research and stress...
generation research.

- Discussion section - the sentence that starts with “In line with these findings, several measure of minor stress have...”. There is extraneous information here. I think it could be reduced to “In line with these findings, a large proportion of Cypriot students in our sample experienced minor life events like academic stressors, social stressors, and financial stressors, all of which may place these students at risk of depressive symptomatology.” Also, I think the next few sentences citing the Reyes-Rodriguez study could be moved to the section where you discuss gender differences - it seems out of place in this paragraph. Finally, the last section of this paragraph, discussing the results by academic year, should be reported in the results section, not the discussion.

c) Background - In the last paragraph before the “Aims” section, please include a citation after your discussion of problem focused coping possibly decreasing depressive symptoms. Also, the third sentence in this paragraph has “negatively” in it twice.

3. Discretionary revisions
d) Method - Data analysis section - when you discuss the CESD groups, it says “/60” after the score ranges. What does this mean?
e) Results section - “Frequency of reported life events” section - there should not be parentheses around “family get-togethers”.
f) In the Limitations section - you write “- stress generation” after you mention stress exposure, which doesn’t seem appropriate to include.
g) Third paragraph of Discussion - “Concerning stressful life events on among university students...” should read, “Concerning stressful life events among university students...”
h) Fifth paragraph of Discussion - a sentence currently reads, “There was a stepwise increase in the prevalence of clinically significant depressive symptoms in terms of increasing LESS scores and, in fact, the association appeared more robust when using the LESS score. We found a 3-fold increase...” which seems cumbersome. I would suggest it read, “There was also a stepwise increase in the prevalence of clinically significant depressive symptoms in terms of increasing LESS scores, with a 3-fold increase...”.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests