Reviewer’s report

Title: Depression, anxiety, and suicide among Vietnamese secondary school students and proposed solutions: a cross-sectional study

Version: 2 Date: 20 August 2013

Reviewer: Augustine J Kposowa

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Major Compulsory Revisions
1. In Table 4, authors have a heading in the last two columns: Multivariate Regression. It is unclear from the table what the outcome variable is. The general heading is Association between suicide and poor mental health. I would like authors to modify that heading from suicide to suicide ideation or suicidal behavior. This is because what is being discussed in the paper is NOT completed suicide but types of suicidal behavior (ideation, attempts, planning). Authors also need to change the main title of the paper (page 1) to reflect the fact that they do not have data on completed suicides.

2. The last two tables are very difficult to follow. This has to do largely with the way authors decided to format the tables. In Table 3, for instance, authors have variable names going into the next two columns. I advise that they prevent variable names or descriptions from extending beyond column 1 titled "Factors." I also wonder why that column is titled Factors. If confirmatory factor analysis were used, is it appropriate to call these factors?

3. In Table 3, (under Depression), the number of cases in the cell called YES is just 32, compared to the NO cell with 442 persons. The next column has even fewer persons (23). Would authors address the issue of the validity of chi-squared results based on so few cases? Should the reader be concerned? The issue basically is this: if one were to distribute these 23 people across covariate categories in the logistic regression equation (last two columns), might there be expected cell frequencies less than 10. If the answer is YES, then some correction has to be done as the validity of the estimate (in this case Odds Ratio) is questionable. Typically, a cell with fewer than expected cases could lead to the inflation of an estimate (OR). Please check and also consult a couple of texts, e.g. Applied Logistic Regression (Hosmer and Lemeshow, latest edition), Logistic Regression (Kleinbaum and Klein, second edition or later). If there is nothing that you can do, then in the Discussion tell the reader to interpret the results with caution, and this would be enough (since you cannot create data that do not exist). You at the very least need to show understanding of the issues and be sensitive.

Minor Essential Revisions
1. The participants in the study are secondary school students that for the most
part are likely below 18 years of age. On page 3, authors move from describing poor mental health among secondary school students to university students. See this sentence: "This percentage was found to be even higher among first year students at Cantho University School of Medicine and Pharmacy." I suggest that the reference to university students be eliminated, and that authors stick to secondary school students.

2. Is it possible to add a few more control variables to Table 4? For instance, do authors have measures of SES of parents/guardians? They provide educational stress, which I assume is being measured by information furnished by participants. What about marital status of parents, number of sibblings, household size, income or some indicator, educational attainment of one of the parents? These variables have been shown in the suicide literature to influence suicidal behavior, and a couple (like marital status and household size) tap into social integration (as suggested by Durkheim and other sociologists). Readers will have more confidence in the results if a couple of these are included in the multivariate results. If you do not have them, say so.

Discretionary Revisions

1. On page 4, authors waste valuable space by informing readers of the location of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. I think the readers of this journal know the relative location of those cities in Vietnam. You need not mention that Hanoi is in the North each time that Hanoi is mentioned.

2. There is a sub-heading entitled Ethics (page 7). The information provided there is identical to what appears on page 4 under Study Design and Study Population. To eliminate redundancy, I suggest that authors delete either what appears on page 4 "The study was approved by the Scientific and Training Committees of Cantho University of Medicine..." or the Ethics subheading at the bottom of page 7. There is no need to have redundant information in the document.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.