Reviewer’s report

Title: Determination of the social risk factors related to suicide attempts in Iran: A meta-analysis

Version: 1 Date: 21 August 2012

Reviewer: Jltender Sareen

Reviewer’s report:

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

1. There is background literature information presented in the discussion section which would be better placed in the introduction section.

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

1. In the Introduction, the authors write that “suicide is defined as deliberation action in order to kill himself”. This only includes one gender, and should be expanded to include both men and women.

2. In the Introduction, the authors write that suicide may be due to the “purpose of impress others”. The word “impress” implies that others feel admiration or respect towards the individual. A better phrase would be to “get the attention of others”, though it is not certain if this is what the authors meant.

3. In the Introduction, the authors write that risk factors include “three different areas of mental disorders”. The authors need to be specific. It would be important to clarify whether the authors meant broad categories of mental disorders versus specific mental disorders. It would be best if the authors listed the specific mental disorders or categories.

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

1. This manuscript needs to be extensively checked and revised for grammatical and syntax errors. There are numerous errors throughout each part of the document. There is a double period in the discussion section and a spelling error in Figure 3. These errors detract from the message in the paper and are cumbersome to try to overcome when reading the document. This writing is not acceptable and needs to be overhauled. From the first sentence in the abstract and onwards, there are numerous sentences that do not make sense. It is recommended that a team member who is well versed in the English language revise this document.

2. The authors write in the Introduction that “every suicide attempt increases the risk of successful suicide”. This is a disturbing comment, as suicide is never a
“success” but rather a reflection of the failures of society. This term should be removed throughout the text.

3. In the Methods section, the authors searched the national databases for “suicide”. There is no clarity as to why the other terms such as “suicide attempt” were not added in the search.

4. The authors write that they excluded papers which were “irrelevant”, those that did not provide usable information, and those of poor quality. It would be helpful to be a bit clearer in the distinction between those three categories. For example, what defines poor quality? Poor statistical power? Small populations?

5. The authors extracted information about the geographical location and social risk factors related to suicide. Was there not a reason why other risk factors, such as the presence of a mental disorder, were not studied?

6. There is too much causality given in the results section. In the abstract, the authors state that “the most important cause of suicide attempts among 20 analyzed articles was family conflict”, but one cannot ascertain with certainty that it is because of family conflict that individuals engaged in self-harm. It is quite possible that there is a mediating variable, for example, heightened stress, at play, but this is not discussed by the authors.

7. There is not enough discussion about the mechanisms of action that could be contributing to self-harm in this population. How are the risk factors linked to self-harm?

8. It is an interesting finding that climate is a factor in self-harm. Why is climate an important variable (living in coastal or mountainous regions) to study? How would this be related to attempted suicide? What is the mechanism of action?

9. Why would the definition of “student” be equivocal with the definition of “educational failure”? Many adults are high-achieving and go on to do post-secondary education (therefore are defined as students) but these are people who are actually educational successes rather than failures.

10. What defines economical constraint? A certain household income? This needs to be more clearly defined.

11. Why would year of study impact the data? Was there political unrest or something specific that affected certain cohorts of individuals?

12. In the discussion section, "using results of suicide attempts (dead, alive, or combination of both)" is problematic because it would be assumed that suicide attempters remained alive, versus those who died by suicide. It is possible that those who attempted suicide later did die by their injuries.

13. For an individual without detailed knowledge about the culture of Iran, not enough information is presented to provide a coherent explanation for the findings. In the discussion, the sentence "it seems that the differences in the culture, life style, facilities and other socio-medicine variables in different parts of
Iran to be the main reason behind the wide spectrum of the reported results among various studies" as explaining differences is not helpful. The reader is not given information to denote how various geographical regions within Iran differ from one another.