Reviewer's report

Title: How do adolescents talk about self-harm? A qualitative study of disclosure in an ethnically diverse urban population in England

Version: 1 Date: 12 November 2012

Reviewer: Myfanwy Maple

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the manuscript How do adolescents talk about self-harm? A qualitative study of disclosure in an ethnically diverse population in England by Klineberg and colleagues. This is a very interesting topic, and the authors present their qualitative findings in a very meaningful manner.

Major compulsory revisions

My main criticism of this paper is that with the topic of self harm in young people, the authors do no mention at all Non Suicidal Self Injury (NSSI) which has been written about extensively in relation to self harm in young people. NSSI is completely absent from the literature review. An additional rationale for inclusion of NSSI is the clear relationship of NSSI to some of the young people quoted in the study (for example, ‘I just punch stuff … and then I get scars, p. 8). Interestingly throughout the paper no distinction is made between self harm and suicide intent (or lack thereof) until page 14 in relation to the understandings from the group of young people who had no self harmed. There is a burgeoning literature on NSSI and self harm especially in relation to young people, and some consideration of this literature is vital to accurately place this study.

My second concern is that the manuscript is trying to do too much, is too ambitious and thus the depth that one would expect in a qualitative paper is sometimes missing. This is especially so of the inclusion of culture as a key topic (even so far as including this in the title). However, the ways in which culture is expressed within the paper is minimal, and I would suggest that this would be worthy of a separate paper, rather than trying to fit this into an already full paper of three sub groups of young people narrating their experience of self harm (or views of for those who have not self harmed).

Minor essential revisions

A final minor point is the information about the screening for young people to participate. From the four schools who agreed to have the researchers screen their students for participation, there are some unanswered questions in relation to procedure that the manuscript would benefit by including. This is particularly so in relation to the screening process used. It is not clear what happened between the 319 students who were screened and the thirty who participated in this study, other than the gender and experience ratios for the schools. However,
given the three criteria (self harmed regularly, self harmed once, never self harmed) all 319 would have met this criteria – what was the additional proposive techniques to draw out the sample?

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 that I have no competing interests