Reviewer’s report

Title: Prevalence and gender patterns of mental health problems in German youth with experiences of violence: the KiGGS study.

Version: 1 Date: 13 March 2013

Reviewer: Christin Carotta

Reviewer’s report:

I had the opportunity to review this manuscript, which examines the prevalence of mental health problems in German youth based on gender and experiences of violence. Two main research questions were addressed: 1) What are the prevalence rates and distributions of several internalizing and externalizing mental health problems by gender and youth involvement in violence; and 2) What are the associations between gender and mental health problems for adolescents who are affected by violence either as perpetrators, victims, or perpetrating victims? The manuscript contributes to existing literature with the use of a large nationally representative sample of German youth age 11-17. Findings provide important clinical implications for the future consideration of youth mental health in relation to gender and varying experiences with violence. The study, however, has several acknowledged limitations and would benefit from further clarification of methodology. I have included some suggestions for the authors to consider.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

Introduction:

1. The questions posed by the authors are clearly stated. It would be helpful, however, for the authors to define internalizing and externalizing mental health problems. It is further suggested the authors explicitly state within the introduction which mental health outcomes are considered internalizing versus externalizing.

2. The authors provide important inclusion of several relevant studies. There is no clearly articulated theoretical framework, however. Elaborating on the “social and biological reasons” why internalizing disorders are more frequent in females while externalizing disorders are more prevalent in males, may provide an avenue for the inclusion of theoretical underpinnings (page 6).

Methods:

3. This study includes a nationally representative sample of impressive size. Further information, however, is needed regarding sampling and measurement to demonstrate the soundness of data (specific suggestions in #4-8).
4. How were the primary sample units selected?

5. How was information about the study and the self-administered questionnaires dispersed?

6. More information regarding the weighting of the sample population would be beneficial.

7. Additional information regarding specific measures is also needed. For instance: 1) What were the response options for violence involvement; and 2) What types of questions and response options are included in the SDQ?

8. Parent-reported ADHD diagnosis: On page 9, the authors note that in Germany, the diagnosis of ADHD is “not legally restricted to child and adolescent psychiatrists or clinical child psychologists” but it is “likely, however, that clinical diagnoses are usually assigned by these professional groups.” What empirical support indicates this likelihood?

Discussion:

9. The authors clearly stated several significant limitations for this work, with specific mention of the single-item violence assessment and acknowledgment that participants were not provided with a definition of violence. Further clarification and discussion, however, is needed with regards to the “limited information” that resulted in measures that “necessarily remain fuzzy” (page 17).

Minor Essential Revisions:

10. The authors importantly acknowledge that these findings speak to associations rather than causality. However, causality is suggested in the first sentence of the implication section (page 17).

11. On page 5, the term “striking behavior” is slightly confusing when embedded within the discussion of violence. Is there empirical support for the statement that these ADHD behaviors “render individuals targets for peer aggression?”

12. Clarification is needed to indicate what general population the statistics regarding the prevalence of mental health disorders refers to (page 5).

**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