Reviewer's report

Title: Suicide and Related Health Risk Behaviours among School Learners in South Africa: Results from the 2002 and 2008 national Youth Risk Behaviour Surveys

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Reviewer: Daphna Levinson

Reviewer's report:

The paper describes data from two rounds of cross sectional survey of youth behaviors that included questions on suicide behaviors.

In general the authors need to improve the reporting the results and the writing especially of the Methods section, needs to be more organized into the usual sections.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Other questions

The methods section :

• Does everybody in South Africa go to school ? in other words , is it a "school learner sample" or a "youth sample " ?

• "All learners in the selected classes were eligible to participate" [p.9] does it mean that they were actually selected ?

• The authors should explain why the criteria for suicide referred only to 6 months and not to 1- year . There may be a good explanation to divert from the 1 year criterion but it needs to be written.

• Why were suicide ideation and suicide planning averaged into one score called suicide ideation ? These two measures are usually reported separately because they have different meaning .

The Results

• What was the relationship between ideation planning and attempt ? How many moved from ideation to planning and to an attempt ?

• "Nationwide, 18% of the students in 2002 and 19% in 2008 indicated to have seriously considered and/or made a plan to commit suicide during the past six months. This number was significantly higher for girls than for boys in both surveys (see Table 1). ...."

• The question is whether the combination of ideation and planning into one score brought the high total rates and whether the combined score masked a
difference between the girls higher ideations and relatively lower planning, and the boys higher planning. Also, studies show that girls reach their peak in suicide behaviors earlier than boys. With such a rich data set the authors should have checked the difference between grades.

• "Stepwise logistic regression analyses were conducted to identify significant associations between the demographic, psychological and risk behavior measures" Which subgroups were included in the analysis? Was the regression analysis of suicide attempts done only within the group that indicated suicide ideation? if not why not?

Minor revisions
In some cases the writing is too detailed for example, "Following the training, teams with a minimum of 3 members were sent " is there a special reason to provide such details?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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' below