Author's response to reviews

Title: Evaluating the effectiveness of a training program to build teachers' capacity to identify and appropriately refer middle and high school students with mental health problems in Brazil

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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To the Editors of BMC Public Health

Dear Editors,

Thank you for the opportunity of submitting a revised manuscript to BMC Public Health (title edited by Edanz Group Global Ltd “Evaluating the effectiveness of a training program to build teachers’ capability to identify and appropriately refer middle and high school students with mental health problems in Brazil: An exploratory study”).

We are again grateful to the reviewers for the important comments and suggestions that have allowed us to improve the manuscript. This covering letter explains the revisions made, as requested by Dr. Larry Wissow.

The revised manuscript (including title and abstract) had the language edited by Edanz Group Global Ltd (www.edanzediting.com/bmc1) which services were recommended by BioMed Central. It can be opened using a password sent to us by e-mail (moon3995).

Title page, Abstract, Competing Interest, Authors Contribution, Acknowledgments and References were included in the main manuscript file. One more reference (number 22) was added to attend the reviewer’s requirement.

Copies of all questionnaires used in the study were translated into English and provided as additional files, except the Youth Self-Report (YSR) due to copyright conditions (unauthorized reproduction of forms is forbidden by law). YSR forms can be ordered directly from the author’s online store (www.aseba.org). Also, a sample of the YSR form is available on the website.

We are sending the following electronic files:

- MAIN MANUSCRIPT FILE
- Three separate files for questionnaires
- Five separate files for tables

Please find below comments and suggestions from Dr. Larry Wissow followed by the authors’ answers (answers in italic).

Thank you for your consideration of our paper.

Sincerely yours,

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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Title: Evaluating the effectiveness of a training program to build teachers' capability of identifying and appropriately referring middle and high school students with mental health problems in Brazil: An exploratory study

Version: 1 Date: 7 December 2013

Reviewer: Larry Wissow

Reviewer's report:

Minor but essential
1. Consider a word other than “deviant” for what teachers identify – at least in North American English it has a bad connotation – not just symptoms or departure from healthy function

   We substituted the word “deviant” by “abnormal” in the entire manuscript and abstract.
   We also substituted “non-deviant behaviors” by “behaviors considered normal in adolescence”.

Major
1. I think it is worth a comment that although in general the prevalence of mental health problems among females is usually higher than that of males that the case-control sample here was 80% male. This reflects the teachers' difficulty recognizing internalizing problems as is noted in the results, but it very much reduces the power to see any differences among female students. I think that this is something that needs to be discussed in the limitations - there is a real possibility of gender-based disparities here.

   Thank you for pointing this issue. We completely agree that this is a limitation that must be mentioned.

   Phrase added to the limitation paragraph: “Another limitation was the reduced power within the case-control study to detect any differences in the types of mental health problems observed among female students because 80.8% of the sample was composed of males”.

2. What also seems striking and might need more emphasis is that overall the prevalence of mental health problems among the controls was about the same as in the teacher-nominated group – so that the teachers were not really able to pick out those with problems, they just notice disruptive behavior. I'm not sure I agree with the statement: "it is possible to note that teachers could identify students with a broad diversity of symptoms as in need of mental health care, putting them in their hypothetical referral lists (cases), while no students with these mixed symptoms were found among controls (p = 0.010)." It seems likely that what the teachers noticed in this group was the externalizing component. We have no reason to believe that they were able to really tell this group apart from those with pure externalizing symptoms.

   The two phrases bellow were added to “Discussion” under the topic “Prior ability to identify mental health problems (in practice)”:  
   “It is interesting to note that overall the prevalence of mental health problems identified by the YSR among the controls (57.7%) was about the same as in the teacher-nominated group (53.8%). This can be explained by the teachers' difficulties with interpreting the non-psychopathological adolescent behaviors as normal, as well as interpreting the groups of symptoms that characterize pure internalizing and pure externalizing adolescent behaviors as abnormal”.

“It is reasonable to hypothesize that more symptomatic students are more easily noticed by teachers; however, one must consider that what the teachers noticed in this mixed group was the externalizing component and we can not be sure if they were able to tell this group apart from those with pure externalizing symptoms”.

3. Seems worth noting that the vignette ratings may overstate ability to detect and assess since while 73% of the teachers were said to be able to recognize depression at baseline on the vignette study that the detection rate of internalizing symptoms in the case control study was very low.

The paragraph below corresponding to an additional reference [22] was added to “Discussion” under the topic “Effectiveness of the psychoeducational strategy for teachers”:

“Study results also showed that 80.0% of teachers already knew how to identify the vignette of depression as a problem and to make the appropriate referral before training. However, the detection rate of internalizing symptoms in the case-control study was very low. This fact illustrates a discrepancy between the amount of theoretical knowledge teachers have and their attitudes in practice. In a study by Pearcy, Clopton and Pope [22] sixty-four third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers were asked to read vignettes that described boys and girls with externalizing and internalizing disorders, and to report on their prior experience in referring their own students for treatment according to different student behavior profiles. Teachers reported having referred more children with externalizing problems than with internalizing problems, even though in the vignettes they rated externalizing and internalizing problems as similarly needing referral. The discrepancy existing between teachers’ responses to hypothetical children and to their own students may be explained by the realities of the classroom environment. When analyzing vignettes, teachers have no personal involvement with the child, but when dealing with actual students, the degree of classroom disruption further influences their decision to refer the child for mental health evaluation”.

Discretionary revisions

1. Both the introduction and the discussion have a lot of interesting information that does not focus on the results and in the case of the discussion really doesn’t derive from the results. I think that the paper could be shortened.

We agree that the introduction and the discussion could be shortened. However, the manuscript topic is new in Brazil and we consider useful to give the less informed readers a broader view of the issues involving teachers’ training in child mental health. We also consider useful to give more detailed information in the introduction regarding the prevalence rates of child mental health problems in Brazil and the Brazilian context of public schools since child mental health care is only provided in external services.

Level of interest:
An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English:
Needs some language corrections before being published

The revised manuscript (including abstract) had the language edited by Edanz Group Global Ltd (www.edanzediting.com/bmc) which services were recommended by BioMed Central.

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