Reviewer's report

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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Reviewer: Larry Wissow

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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

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.

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.

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.

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.
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

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.