Reviewer’s report

Title: Social Relationship Correlates of Major Depressive Disorder and Depressive Symptoms in Switzerland: Nationally Representative Cross Sectional Study

Version: 1 Date: 31 October 2013

Reviewer: Katherine L Fiori

Reviewer’s report:

The authors address an important question of the relative contribution of various social relationship factors to depressive symptoms and major depressive disorder in a very large sample of Swiss adults. The article is well-written and concise. I have just a few comments (below):

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The first sentence of the ‘Methods’ section of the Abstract is not a complete sentence.

2. On p. 4, the authors are missing the word ‘of’ in the following sentence: “have used a broad, theoretically representative set of relationship domains” and missing the word ‘a’ in the following sentence: “which are each comprised of a number of dimensions.”

3. On p. 6, the authors need to make ‘utilize’ past tense (i.e., “We utilized data…”)

4. It is not clear what all of the numbers represent in Table 3. The authors need to state in the title of the table what the various numbers (e.g., in parantheses) represent.

Major Compulsory Revisions

5. The description of the social relationship measures is confusing. First, it is not clear whether the items provided represent example items or are indeed single items (e.g., to measure ‘unmet support needs’, is the question “Do you ever miss having someone to talk to about your problems” the only item that assesses this?) Furthermore, the authors write that social contacts were defined using the sum of 5 questions, but it is not clear what those questions are. It is also unclear whether “social contacts” is one of these 5 questions or a separate variable. Also, what do the authors mean by “social contacts were coded in four indicator variables representing 5 categories” – and do those 5 categories represent number of people? (e.g., in the 0-9 category represents having 0 to 9 social contacts?)

6. Limitations/Issues – 0 is very different from 1, which is very different from more than one (problematic that 0 to 9 is combined)
7. On p. 9 the authors write that confidant and tangible support were ‘scaled’ – how was that done? And how does that make these variables comparable to loneliness and social contacts, which were measured on continuous scales?

8. The four education categories should be specified in the text.

9. On p. 9 the authors write that three social relationship variable had more than two categories (loneliness, confidant, and tangible support) – but what about social contacts? That also had more than two categories…

10. I am curious as to whether the researchers have considered a possible confound between loneliness and depressive symptoms. I am not familiar with the DSQ, but the CESD for example has items that essentially assess loneliness, making it difficult to correlate loneliness with depressive symptoms. At the very least, this should be acknowledged as a limitation.

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