Reviewer’s report

Title: Suicidal tendencies and attitude towards freedom to choose suicide among Lithuanian schoolchildren: results from three cross-sectional studies in 1994, 1998, and 2002

Version: 1 Date: 12 May 2005

Reviewer: Dirk Dhossche

Reviewer’s report:

General

A. Overall this project has very exciting results and this data is gold. Unfortunately the impact of the magnitude of the project is lost in poorly organized, unclear writing. Some significant writing revisions are needed.

B. The study analyses representative samples at 3 different times. This design only allows for correlational studies. Therefore, the use of "predictor" in the conclusion (abstract) is not appropriate, and should be correlate (in our opinion).

C. The term "Risk of Suicide" implies that individuals in the high risk group will have higher rates of suicide. Although this may be, it is speculative. Maybe "High Level of Suicidality" is a better term.

D. In discussing causal links between attitude towards suicide and risk for suicide, it may be useful to provide data showing rates of suicide in young people during the study period, i.e., 1994-2002, and discuss any differences or trends.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Methods-Measures

The description of the groups is unclear, the authors describe those without suicide tendencies as having stated that they have never thought about suicide, and describes those having suicide tendencies as those who have had any suicidal thoughts at all. Simply having suicidal thoughts does not mean the participants had tendencies. If the authors feel the need to divide these responses into groups, appropriate labels should be applied. Perhaps those with and without suicide ideation would be more accurate. Thus corrections of the word tendencies which implies behaviors throughout the document seem warranted.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Abstract-Background

1) The author wrote, suicidal behavior is increasingly becoming a phenomenon . . . It would be more clear to write . . . suicidal behavior is becoming a phenomenon increasingly.

2) Throughout the document the authors fail to place the and a before nouns often times violating parallelism in writing. It reads like a shorthand method of writing, but interrupts flow. For example,
the author wrote . . . becoming a phenomenon associated with young people and important public health issue in Lithuania, adding an before important would create more clarity and would create parallelism. There are several other sentences throughout the manuscript with the same problem.

3) The authors say that finding out the relationship among the variables associated with suicidal ideation and threats in the normal population WILL eventually result in better understanding of the more serious forms of adolescent suicidal behavior. The word WILL seems too strong, you may consider replacing it with MAY.

4) In this paragraph you discuss your variables as attitude and behavior but change the order to behavior and attitude in later sentences. Its more clear to keep them in the same order.

Abstract-Results

5) For some variables you report percentages and others you do not, be consistent.
6) The authors wrote. . . the number of suicidal attempts increased from 1.0% in 1994 to 1.8% in the year 1998, and to 1.7% in the year 2002. However, the attempts did not increase each year only between 1994 and 1998. It might be better to say they changed rather than increased. The same is true of the same sentence in the results section of the article
7) The use of the word favourable is questionable and will be discussed in the Results section of the review

Background

8) The first two sentences of the second paragraph are unclear and poorly worded for understanding.
9) Halfway through the first second paragraph the word conceptualise is misspelled
10) The authors wrote, As it is stated in the literature, this issue is important in assessing risk for suicide. The authors might clarify what this issue is and might want to explain how or why it is important for more clarity
11) The last paragraph the first sentence discusses the studys aim and would be more accurate to describe adolescents as Lithuanian adolescents.
12) The last sentence is in passive voice and would be more powerful in active voice

Methods-Subjects and Study Procedures

13) It might be more appropriate to discuss those involved in the study as participants rather than subjects, but thats up to the author stylistically and the journal
14) At the end of the first paragraph is another incident of passive voice.
15) The third paragraph contains the word, striven which seems awkward and interrupts flow.
16) Instead of saying the participants, filled in questionnaires, completed seems appropriate.

Methods-Measures

17) Good inclusion of questions, it allows the reader to know exactly what you are talking about when you discuss suicide later in your manuscript.
18) Good reverse translation strategy to increase methodological rigor.
19) The first sentence of the last paragraph needs the word of after the word actions.

Results

20) 2nd to the last sentence of the first paragraph states, in the period of the last four years, authors should list years, last four years from present day or some time period of study?
21) First sentence of second paragraph states that prevalence rates are at the same high level. The authors need to compare this to other percentages from other samples or anchor these numbers in some way. Explain why 8% is high.
22) The third sentence states that, according to the data, the problem of suicide is vivid already in young age, especially boys. It is unclear if the authors mean suicide ideation or completion by the word suicide since previous sentences addressed ideation. The word vivid is unclear and awkward. If the authors are discussing ideation in this sentence then the gender information is contradictory to
the previous sentence in the paragraph, if they are talking about completion it would be good to clarify that.

23) Authors discuss a decrease in prevalence but fail to address as compared to whom. The last sentence of this paragraph also fails to address what is meant by same level and what is meant by indicators.

24) The second half of the second to last paragraph in the results section is entirely too long and is very unclear.

25) Also the authors might consider organizing the results according to hypotheses and utilizing headers for a clear read of a long results section, although this is a stylistic preference.

Discussion

26) The first sentence of the second paragraph states, findings of anonymous questioners and I am sure the authors meant questionnaires.

27) At some times the authors write-out the words for the ages of the participants, other times they use the numbers. Consistency is preferred.

28) First sentence of the third paragraph uses the words allow proposing another word, perhaps, indicate might be more clear.

29) The second sentence of the third paragraph mentions positive changes but fails to explain them.

30) The phrase fifth formers boys is new in the document and is unclear to the reader.

31) The last sentence of the third paragraph contains the word percents which I believe should be percent.

32) The first sentence of the third paragraph from the end of the discussion describes children as having adopted a very tolerant view of suicide. Im not sure the word tolerant accurately describes your findings. Perhaps an increased acceptance of the choice or right to commit suicide would be more accurate. Tolerant of suicide seems different than thinking someone has the choice to this reviewer. The next sentence the authors discuss how the view of suicide has credibly grown which is a much better descriptor than tolerant. Also the authors should discuss credibly by quantifying or qualifying what this means.

33) In the middle of the last paragraph, the use of these results are consistent with . . . is unclear. The reviewer is not sure of what results the authors are referencing. The previous sentence does not lend itself well to a these.

34) The limitations of the study would be better in their own paragraph.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Declaration of competing interests:
We declare that we have no competing interests.

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