Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluating the SOS Suicide Prevention Program: A Replication and Extension

Version: 2  Date: 31 January 2007

Reviewer: Kees van Heeringen

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General
Due to the limited research and evaluation of prevention programs, it is clear that this study provides relevant data regarding suicide prevention in young people. Notwithstanding several strengths of the study (e.g., a randomised study in a large sample; accurate and advanced statistical analysis) there is however one important drawback to the study which has a major impact on the results and interpretation, i.e. the study-design did not include a pretest-condition which makes it impossible to compare baseline-data with post-test results in the experimental and control group.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. p. 4; 2nd paragraph: the used reference regarding the evaluation of prevention programs is rather outdated (i.e. Ploeg et al., 1996); it is recommended to include more recent studies as there have been recent randomised controlled studies with important findings regarding prevention programs (Portzky & van Heeringen, 2006; Gould et al., 2005).
2. p.7; 1th paragraph: there is only limited information regarding the implementation of the screening instrument which is however a highly important aspect of the program. It is mentioned in the Method-section that students with high scores “were encouraged to seek help immediately”. It is however not clear how this was done; does this imply referral for professional help and if so, how was referral done? Was there a follow-up of the students ‘at risk’ to assess whether they had received help? Were students ‘at risk’ further screened through interviews and if not, wasn’t there a large number of false-positives? There is also no data regarding the screening in the Result-section. Although a full description would probably change the focus of the paper it is however relevant to know how many students were identified as being ‘at risk’ and how many were referred for professional help.
3. p. 8: 2nd paragraph: 8% of the students did not participate but the reasons for non-participation are not listed in the text (was this due to refusal of the parents or mainly to absence of the students?)
4. p. 14: It is mentioned in the Discussion-section that the program is associated with “significant improvements in knowledge and attitudes”, but as there is no pretest-condition (and as a result no baseline-results) it is not possible to detect improvement (or deterioration). It would therefore be more accurate to state that youths in the intervention-group have higher scores on knowledge and attitudes than controls.
5. p. 16; 2nd paragraph: The limitation-section does indicate that pretest measures would add confidence that the assignment of classes to experimental conditions resulted in equivalent groups but the most important limitation of the absence of a pretest-condition is however not mentioned (i.e. the posttest-only collection only allows for comparison between the experimental and control group but not for comparison in the experimental group to assess whether there is a difference before and after to program which makes it possible to evaluate whether the program is able to improve knowledge/attitudes-scores and prevalence of suicidality).
6. p. 15-16: There is no comparison with other evaluations of similar school-programs in the Discussion-section which is however strongly advised especially since the majority of previous studies did include a pretest-condition.

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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