Reviewer's report

Title: Correlates of depression among youth in California: Findings from the 2003 California Health Interview Survey

Version: 3 Date: 16 November 2006

Reviewer: Glorisa Canino

Reviewer's report:

General

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

The manuscript presents data obtained from the 2003 California Health Interview Survey. The prevalence and correlates of depressive symptoms are compared between Latino and non Latino White adolescents. The study is one of the few to present comparative data on symptoms of depression for these two ethnic groups living in the United States. There is a wide and emerging literature on this topic comparing the rates and correlates of depression between adult Latinos with non Latino White adults, but very few studies address this issue with adolescent samples. The manuscript clearly states the goals of the study, the methods are well described and referenced and are appropriate for the goals presented. Similarly, the statistics and inferences drawn from the results of the study are appropriately stated. There are however methodological issues that detract from the scientific merits of the study.

Throughout the paper the authors refer to acute depression or depression which is usually the term used when referring to clinical depression or depression based on the Psychiatric Nomenclature (either DSM IV or ICD-10). However, the investigators are not measuring depression but symptoms of depression as ascertained by a shortened version of the C-ESD Symptom Scale. In addition, and most important, there is no attempt to draw a cut point based on psychometric analyses of both ethnic groups. In fact, the cut off for determining (depression vs. no depression) was done arbitrarily by dividing the maximum score (24) in half, so that those above a score of 11 would be considered depressed. In fact, this cut off should represent high or low symptoms of depression and not depression vs. no depression as claimed by the authors. But there is no way of telling if this is indeed what this cut off is measuring. There are many published articles in the literature (See Roberts et al.....) that have used the C-ESD among Mexican American adolescents that have developed cut off scores for this population based on psychometric analyses. In addition, these studies also provide some important information on the correlates of depression among this group. Unfortunately these articles are not quoted at all in the paper. In fact, it is surprising that the only quote in the introduction related to the topic is one by Lara et al, which is not focused on symptoms of depression alone. This would be acceptable if there were no other studies in the literature. (see Roberts, R.E. (1980). Reliability of the CES-D Scale in different ethnic contexts. Psychiatry Research, 2, 125-134., for psychometrics among Mexican American adolescents, check for other more recent articles of these authors to examine correlates of depression in this group).

If psychometric analyses cannot be performed, at least the discussion should mention as an important limitation the fact that it is not known the extent to which the cut off of symptoms of depression represents or means the same thing for both ethnic groups or the extent to which it measures the same construct in low and high acculturated Latino groups.

The authors state that with few exceptions family structure has rarely been assessed as a correlate of depression. In fact, the opposite is the norm since most psychiatric epidemiology studies in the adult and child literature include family structure as a demographic correlate for depression and other psychiatric disorders. Not always a relationship is found, but it is generally included in most population based studies.

Finally, it would be important for the authors to discuss the counterintuitive findings that Latino ethnicity emerged as a risk factor only among high economic status and social support. There is an emerging literature on the relationship between ethnic/racial discrimination and psychiatric disorders, particularly depression. The literature points out that higher income is strongly related to perceived discrimination and that discrimination is strongly related to the risk for depression. Although the study did not measure
discrimination, this is a plausible hypothesis for this finding. It is also expected that Latinos who are high income are possibly the group with higher acculturation, and it is not clear the extent to which the cutoff used in the depression scale is a better indicator of depressive symptoms in this group as opposed to Latinos with lower acculturation.

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 whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.