Reviewer’s report

Title: Child sexual abuse in southern Brazil and associated factors: a population-based study

Version: 2 Date: 25 January 2009

Reviewer: Alfgeir Logi Kristjansson

Reviewer’s report:

This is a well conducted study on a difficult and sensitive subject. I find the authors' work impressive and they should be appraised for their courage. The conclusions are carefully put forward.

Mostly, the study is methodologically sound but some compulsory revisions should be carried out- especially in clarifying the testing of concepts mentioned in the methods section that have not been previously accounted for in the introduction.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Abstract Background: The second sentence currently reads: “The negative consequences – physical and emotional - of childhood sexual abuse are broad and pervasive, including increased risk factor of developing psychiatric disorders”. Although I understand the point, the latter part (including...) does not grammatically relate correctly with the first part. More correct would be to state simply “including increased risks of developing psychiatric disorders”.

Abstract Methods: First sentence now reads “A two-stage sampling strategy was used to generate representative population-based estimates”. Enough to say “population estimates” instead of “population-based estimates”.

The meaning of the acronym “CSA” is not clear in the abstract. It would suffice to state this in the first sentence after “child sexual abuse” (CSA).

Abstract Results: Authors should use past tense in their reporting of results.

The sentence “Boys experienced CSA at younger ages..” “ages” should be “age” and “than girls” should be added in the end of this sentence.

Abstract Conclusion: The first sentence currently sounds: “Results suggest that CSA happens at young ages and is associated with physical violence, making it likely to have serious health and developmental consequences”. I would suggest the change: “Results suggest that CSA takes place among young age groups and is associated with physical violence, making it more likely to have serious health and developmental consequences”.

Introduction
First sentence: Which community is being referred to? Any community or communities in general, or even local communities? The same goes for top of page 4: “the community” is unclear to me.

Page 4, sentence “highly selected samples [14]” may be clearer to simply state “selective samples”.

Page 4, sentence “Reasonable estimates of the dimension of the problem and its potential burden to society can only be obtained directly in the community”. Again “the community” is not clear to me. Shouldn’t this be “…directly from each community”.

Methods
The first sentence pertains that data collection took 7 months and that is was a part of a larger study designed to study the prevalences of hearing impairment. The manuscript would benefit from a more detailed description of this 7 month process as well as a further description about the relationship between the objectives of the hearing impairment study and this study.

I had a difficulty in understanding why the census data from 1991 is used as a reference to the number of people in an average household. Please clarify. Also, the sentence "To obtain the number of participants required, 1040....". What does "required" refer to? This is uncellar. In general, the section describing the sample and the selection of participants needs to be clear enough for the reader to replicate the process simply by reading it.

Bottom of page 6, sentence 2. "Factors that could be associated with child sexual abuse were also measured..." Why could these factors be associated with CSA? This needs clarification and discussion in the Introduction. Also, about stressful life events. This is a large area of study in the social- and health sciences. For contextual purposes, this should be discussed in the introduction section prior to data testing.

Results
Page 10. The heterogeneity test described in paragraph 2 has not been mentioned in the methods section. All analyses techniques should be clearly outlined in the methods section before reported in the results.

Also, significant tests support hypotheses but can never "confirm" them.

Page 12. Paragraph 2. "sensitivity analysis" has not been described in the methods section- please clarify.

Discussion
Paragraph 2, page 12. These prevalence rates are not the same as the ones on top of page 9. I am pussled with which are the correct ones.

Page 13, paragraph 2 (bottom). "Our estimates underestimate..." It is not clear to me whether this is a statement or a suggestion. If indeed it is a statement it
needs clarification. If it is a suggestion than the word "may" should be added so it would sound "Our estimates may underestimate..."

Comment on limitations: Discussion about potential limitations of the study are mentioned frequently in the Discussion section (e.g. bottom of page 13, bottom of page 14, top of page 15, middle of page 17). I would suggest that these should be collected and reported in one and the same paragraph about limitations in general and reported late in the Discussion section.

Bottom of page 14. "The very low income of the population in the present study...". This is the first time that this is mentioned as a description about the study population. This should have been mentioned before, e.g. in discussing the sample in the methods section, or put in context in the Introduction. The same goes for top of page 15 "sample drawn from an urban area of southern Brazil".

Minor Essential Revisions

Results

Paragraph 2. "... reported by the sample..." should be "reported by the study participants"

Top of page 12. "...exposure to a larger number of..." should be "...exposure to a greater number of..."

Discussion

Page 12, paragraph 2. 1.7% is not almost 4 times higher than 0.5%. It is just over three times higher.

Page 13. Lower middle section. "Reports from other countries also confirm our findings..." Should be "Reports from other countries also support our findings..." No study is perfect. Nothing is therefore "confirmed" in research, only supported. The same goes for paragraph 3 on page 15. "Adjustment for confounding variables in the multinomial model confirmed the association..." should be "supported the association..."

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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