Reviewer’s report

Title: The relationship of dental caries and dental fear in Malaysian adolescents: a latent variable approach

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Reviewer: Lisa Heaton

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The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between dental fear and dental caries experience in Malaysian adolescents, using structural equation modeling in order to better to control for measurement error. The authors concluded that while higher dental fear was associated with greater caries experience (particularly in decayed and missing teeth), this association was significant for rural adolescents, but not urban adolescents. This is a generally well-written paper with interesting findings. A few clarifications would improve the overall manuscript.

1. On page 3, “school leavers” is an awkward phrase. “Post-graduates” or something similar is recommended.

2. On page 5, the authors note, “Only schoolchildren whose parents had signed the consent forms...were included in the final sample.” What percentage of all adolescents does this represent? How representative of the entire adolescent population in these schools is the current sample?

3. The authors describe the calibration process on page 6. It sounds as though a single dental assistant was responsible for recording DMFT on all of the participants, then randomly selecting 5% to be re-examined each day. How was the randomization done, to insure a true random selection? In addition, how was the intra-examiner calibration done prior to data collection? Were any of the data examined by a second party to calculate the ICC value?

4. On page 9, the authors state, “A statistically significant difference was found or somatic symptoms of anxiety” between rural and urban adolescents, but the reader has to turn to Table 2 to find out that the rural adolescents showed greater somatic symptoms than the urban adolescents. This should be stated in the text as well as in the table.