Reviewer's report

Title: Early life programming as a target for prevention of child and adolescent mental disorders: intervention and research directions

Version: Date: 4 November 2013

Reviewer: Tim F Oberlander

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

This is an excellent and timely review on a complex topic. Moreover as it ties basic findings to policy implications and as such offers a novel opportunity for knowledge translation.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Yes, the literature reviewed in this paper was well chosen and carefully cited. Three suggestions are offered to strengthen the paper:

One concept that is worth mentioning is that not all developmental outcomes associated with perinatal maternal stress are necessarily adverse (See J.A. DiPietro, Journal of Adolescent Health 2012, and DiPietro JA et al. Child Dev 2006). Such findings offer an opportunity to developing public policy directed at identifying who is at risk and who might be resilient. A second point is a discussion of the role of genetic factors. While some factors might predict adverse outcomes, others such as allelic variations for SLC6A4 may contribute a sensitivity to positive environments (Way, Taylor, 2010; Taylor et al., 2006). Finally, a discussion of the timing of early life exposure may also contribute to such a discussion of both adverse and typical developmental outcomes. Reference to the concept that perinatal maternal mood may actually enhance infant development during the first year of life may be with worth exploring (Sandman et al).

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

n/a

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

n/a

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Given the issues raised in #2 above, increased attention to the possibility of
adverse as well as healthy developmental outcomes and how such findings might be translated into specific recommendations (page 22) would strengthen the paper.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
7. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes.

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

no conflicts to report.