Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Patricia A Brennan

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Discretionary Revisions

This review is focused on a topic that is not new, but has had a resurgence in recent years. Specifically, the authors provide a broad review of the current research linking prenatal exposures and child mental health outcomes. The review is fairly comprehensive, and overall the manuscript is well written. The data that are reviewed are certainly highly relevant to the field of preventative mental health.

Other strengths of the paper include the linkage of empirical reports to a theoretical backdrop (fetal programming), as well as the coverage of both animal and human studies. The authors also note areas of research where data are currently lacking, and they place their review into the present day context of increasing exposures to environmental toxins. Their focus on prenatal exposure to prescribed medications is also timely given the numbers of women taking antidepressants during pregnancy.

In terms of adequate coverage of the literature, two weaknesses were noted. First, the review did not describe or examine the effectiveness of existing perinatal prevention programs (such as the Olds program, which is now widely disseminated). And second, the groups targeted for intervention in the closing paragraph of the review were somewhat generic, particularly when juxtaposed against the very specific set of risk factors that were reviewed and highlighted as potentially relevant to prevention.

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests.