Reviewer's report

Title: The relationship between mentoring on healthy behaviors and well-being among Israeli youth in boarding schools: A mixed-methods study

Version: 3 Date: 19 August 2014

Reviewer: Roger Thomas

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? The title is: “The relationship between mentoring on healthy behaviors and well-being among Israeli youth in boarding schools: A mixed-methods study.” Yes

This is an important and interesting study which I enjoyed reading. My suggestions are to ensure that readers get the most benefit from the data available.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Partly.


No definition of mentoring (major compulsory revision). Some important mentoring literature is cited. There are two up-to-date reviews in Academic Pediatrics on mentoring and drugs/alcohol and mentoring and tobacco by RE Thomas (the Cochrane review discusses definitions of mentoring).

No definition of violence (only 1/10 report no contact with violence in the past 12 months) - what does this mean. It is an alarming statistic. (major compulsory revision).

No explanation of why the Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Survey was chosen as the key outcome measure rather than other measures. No description of its key psychometric properties. (major compulsory revision).

The mixed methods is an appropriate data collection method as the study in addition to the effect of mentors has a broad focus of describing life in Israeli boarding schools, the risk levels of the children attending, and the response of the mentors.

3. Are the data sound?

Search: two dates are given for the search. Which is correct?

Sample: There were 272 pupils and 158 comprise the sample. How was the sample selected? Were the rest refusals? How do they differ from the included
adolescents? (major compulsory revision)

Abstract: are the numbers cited odds ratio or risk ratios? (need to specify if the other numbers are 95% or 99% confidence intervals)

The data were mostly bimodal and the Jaccard coefficient was computed. This is an unusual statistic and needs justification and detailed explanation of its properties. (major compulsory revision)

Smoking prevalence: There is a marked discrepancy in student reports of smoking and mentor perceptions. (major compulsory revision).

Two groups were isolated: 15.6% with never or rare use of alcohol and 57.3% with substantial alcohol use. It is important to describe these groups in detail and assess the effect of mentors.

The key question in the title, the actual effect of the mentors on the students’ substance use behaviours, is not described.

The data are presented as cross-sectional for a single time interval. Do you have data over time to show changes in alcohol, marijuana and tobacco use and effects of mentoring on these?

All studies of adolescent addictions are concerned to identify group influences compared to intervention influences on participants. In this study there is no analysis of differences between the groups of 6 who share a bedroom, or the 12-15 who share a living room. How do these individuals influence each other? Can you correct for clustering by computing intra-class coefficient (ICCs)

Covert behaviour by adolescents (concealing behaviours from adults that adults do not approve of) is an important concern you need to address in your study. The key concern of your article is how mentors affect the adolescents: are they concerned by specific adolescents encouraging others by offering cigarettes or alcohol to initiate these adolescents?

Your articles came alive with the quotes. The problem with quotes is always selecting the more graphic ones and not providing an even representation. Can you provide a balance of quotes?

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

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

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? No. Reasons why 158/272 students and 15 staff (out of a total of ?) were selected is not explained.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? Yes.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes.

9. Is the writing acceptable? Yes, but several typos.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'