Reviewer's report

Title: The vulnerability to alcohol, tobacco, and drug use of adolescents in Hong Kong: A phenomenological study

Version: 0 Date: 03 Jul 2018

Reviewer: Sharyn Burns

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting and important study that aims to explore the social nature of adolescents experiences between parents and significant others (e.g. teachers). The study has included a good qualitative sample, including data from adolescents, parents and teachers/social workers and provides some interesting results. However the themes could be refined to better describe the findings. It is always difficult with qualitative studies to describe results in enough detail within the word count, however I think some reorganising would benefit the results section. When reporting qualitative data it is useful to provide the reader with a level of agreement (for example, did a few, some or most participants data support each theme and sub theme). The discussion and conclusion also need some work to really highlight the key findings of the study. I have provided specific comments below.

Methods

How were the student FGs conducted? Where they run with approximate age groups together. Where the FG mixed gender?

Theme I: The role of parental attachment in shaping adolescents' perceptions of vulnerability
I don't think the results actually tell the reader what the role of parental attachment is in shaping adolescents perceptions of vulnerability. You have presented some interesting data, however it is a bit disjointed and I am not sure they all relate to attachment. Some of the comments relate more to fear and threats (especially the quotes from S14, S19 and S31). There are some interesting data around role models - this would be interesting to explore in more depth

Line 299: The discussion focuses on parents however the supporting quotes are all student quotes. Please clarify if S19 is a parent quote (as it sounds like one). Also discuss the triangulation between the parent and adolescent data in your reporting of the results.

Similarly in line 322 a teacher quote has been used yet the discussion focuses on parents. While the quote refers to parents it is important to discuss triangulation of these data. Was it just the teachers who saw parents as role models? Did adolescents also think their parents could be role models (or male statements that might infer this)? Did parents talk about the need to behave in a certain manner in front of their children?
Theme 2 describes parental knowledge yet the sub themes are more around attitudes - this sub theme describes some parental behaviours (associated with parental drinking and smoking together with their children). While this may connote a lack of knowledge the data (which is presented) is not actually saying this. The theme then describes some peer influences - why are peers and parents presented together as they represent quite a different constructs? The data presented is reflecting quite different influences. The quote from T3 is good as it highlights the strength of peer influences. The quotes describing parents being strict are then a little out of context (after the peer discussion). This could be divided into 2 sub themes and represented as parental influences and peer influences.

b) The belief that their adolescents do not need to be protected from the risks of ATOD use, or the delegation of the responsibility of protection to others.

This sub theme also appears to have a range of sub themes within it and needs consideration. Rather than shifting responsibility some of the comments reflect lack of communication skills, or skills/knowledge as to how to broach the subject of ATOD (e.g. Line 399). There are a range of important issues discussed in this theme including time, school responsibility, letting adolescents decide for themselves and adolescents talking with peers rather than parents (this could possibly be moved to a peer influence theme).

It is valuable to collect data from students, parents and teachers however the triangulation of these results has been minimal. The data analysis would benefit from triangulation and reporting of the three sets of data. For example, as you have done on line 367.

Discussion

The discussion reflects on the importance of attachment as a protective factor however I am not sure that this has been adequately described in the results section.

On line 434 the authors state: Positive parental caregiving, which acknowledged adolescents' vulnerability to addiction, breaking the law, or death, was particularly potent in discouraging adolescents from using ATOD. I am not sure this is conveyed in the results. The comment related to death was a threat - do the authors think this was a realistic threat? This needs to be clarified and explained more succinctly.

On line 439 the authors state "These perceptions of vulnerability did not necessarily have an impact on whether adolescents experimented with ATOD, but essentially structured their patterns of continued use (and perhaps, future abuse)". This also needs to be explored in more detail as this level of detail is not included in the results.

On line 448 the authors state: Furthermore, the students in our study who found the effects of using ATOD to be pleasurable had difficulty stopping their use of ATOD" - I am not sure the results highlight this - please include in more detail in the results if this is to be included.
On line 466 the authors state: "Moreover, even if they tried ATOD, adolescents who formed secure attachments with their parents expressed a willingness to stop using ATOD, so as not to disappoint their parents" - the results don't really tell the reader which adolescents formed secure attachments and which did not - it is difficult to make this statement without this association.

The reference to socio-economic status (line 470) is also not supported in the results.

The discussion does not include reference to the powerful influence of peers - this needs to be included and addressed (and probably should form a theme of its own in the results)

The local context (mentioned in the conclusion) is likely to be important when considering ATOD use, however this is not discussed in the paper. What are parental attitudes towards ATOD use in HK? What are community attitudes and social and cultural norms?

Edits:
- Abstract
  - Line 40, This study aim - reads better as The study aim, or the aim of this study
  - Line 55 their children instead of the children
  - Line 70, change of tense: "who smoked or use alcohol"

Line 76
The authors state: These events are commonly predicated on problematic social relationships, especially with parents who exhibit differences in their parental control based on their child's gender".

How is the difference based on gender?
Line 83: What is meant by 'partner parts of Americans'?
Line 85: Despite the latter protective influence in HK, the age and prevalence of tobacco and alcohol use is persisted.

What do you mean by persisted?
Line 169 add the e.g. the Parent Teacher Association
Line 199 - missing full stop after the reference
Line 255: check sentence structure of the second sentence "Two the 12 .."

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

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