Reviewer’s report

**Title:** The prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of clinically significant depressive symptoms among Cypriot university students: a cross-sectional descriptive co-relational study

**Version:** 2  **Date:** 22 April 2014

**Reviewer:** Seblewengel Lemma

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Title: The prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of clinically significant depressive symptoms among Cypriot university students: a cross-sectional descriptive co-relational study

The author assessed the prevalence of depressive symptoms and its socio-demographic correlates in a student population

The following are my section by section comments:

**Abstract:**
In the background of the abstract the author proposed to identify the causal relationship between the factors mentioned and depressive symptoms; similar descriptions were made in the document somewhere else. Given the design of the study it is not possible to establish causal relationship with the mentioned factors except for the inherent characteristics such as gender. So it wouldn’t be appropriate to talk about causality as this level.

In the result sections of the abstract, the authors reported odds ratios which are not statically significant as statistically significant findings. I suggest they should be reported as non-significant findings (line 22-24).

In the conclusion part, the conclusion is made only for the socio-demographic characteristics but the key findings reported in the result section are beyond socio-demography so good to add more expressive terminology which embraces everything.

**Introduction:**
In this section the author clearly stated the problem this research work is expected to answer, however, the inconsistencies reported by the author as a gap is not well supported by references and did not mention what those inconsistencies were. Besides, the author repeatedly mentioned clinically significant depression; well this has to be defined somewhere at the beginning and must use the term consistently across the document.

**Objectives:**
Here the author mentioned the objectives of the study as aim. It is good to simplify when writing the objectives in a measurable form and provide other detail
descriptions in the methods.
I suggest the author to be cautious when use the word ‘effect’ because it shows direction which cannot be established by the design used in this research.

Methods:
In this section the author tried to state clearly the methodological process they went through and was clearly described. However, there are redundancies for instance under data analysis, the description made about the instrument is already dealt above. Such redundancies make readers loss interest (line 201-212).

The other issue is, in the methods the author mentioned use of backward stepwise regression for the final model. In public health, we don’t usually use such methods in regression because, this method eliminates variables from the final model and these variables excluded from the model are no more controlled for their possible confounding effect which raises the issue of validity of findings. I suggest the author re-calculate the multivariate analysis using the enter method to control the confounders.

Results:
In the section, I suggest the author to avoid the word ‘effect’ from the subtitles. This section required some more organization. The author spends more time on describing the bi-variate analysis when the final model is yet to come. It is good to provide adequate emphasis for the final multivariate model because that is where the adjusted odds ratios are reported. Besides, there are unnecessary details given in the result which confuses the reader for instance the description made in line (349-366) is not that relevant for the overall objective of the study.

As mentioned earlier the author should focus on the multivariate analysis result and report it as it did for the bivariate result. Make sure you have done the analysis again based on the ‘enter’ method. When selecting variables for the final model, it is good to consider both the statically significance and the biological significance of a given variable. For instance we usually put age in the model even when it doesn’t fulfill the statistical criteria we set because age is a known confounder which affect both morbidity and mortality in a population.

Finally the result should be organized based on the objectives to have a flow.

Discussion:
In this section the author discussed the results by comparing the findings with other literature. However, this section again lacks clarity and there are visible redundancies. For instance, in the first paragraph, line 395-397, there is clear repetition. In the same paragraph, the author, reported the result as consistent with other studies, however the prevalence reported raged from some 2% to 70% but I don’t see any consistency here. Instead it is appropriate to appreciate the difference and explain why this difference happens.

Similarly in the same paragraph, the author cited many prevalence studies which
make the discussion very confusing. So in the presence of such ample literature in the area, it is good to focus on findings coming from similar context or closer to one's own context and explain if there is any observed result. The other way of doing this could be reporting similar findings together, then findings higher than what was observed together and provide reason for the difference then findings lower than what was observed and provide similar explanation. This will help to follow through the document easily.

From line 430 onwards, the author focused on the crude result. I suggest this part is taken out. Because the author is interested to look at the relationship between the factors and depression; the final multivariate model is the best result to be discussed.

In line 465, the author talked about risk of depression among students who live alone just by reporting chi-square. This is not appropriate, chi-square doesn't provide such evidence and I suggest the author re-think on this line. In line 482-485, the author needs to provide more literature.

The other important point, the author tends to repeat results in the discussion sections. This makes the result bulky and redundant. For instance line 502 to 505 is already described in this detail in the result section.

The author also mixes discussion with recommendation for instance line 507-509.

Lastly the author considered the possible limitations of the study.

In general, the author addressed the points in each section of the document, however it requires, huge re-organization especially the result and the discussion sections. The author must focus on the main objectives and answer them instead providing sideline information and make the paper bulky. I am saying this for the second time; the author should focus on the main findings in the discussion section. For me the main findings are the prevalence and the results coming out of the multivariate analysis. The others may support the explanations made by the author in the discussion.

The document also need language edition!

The comments on the result and the discussion are major compulsory and the rest are minor essential revisions.

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