Reviewer's report

Title: Associations between childhood maltreatment and emotion processing biases in major depression: results from a dot-probe task

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Reviewer: Richard Porter

Reviewer's report:

This paper represents a useful addition to the literature on the complex subject of emotional processing in depression plus childhood trauma.

Given the lack of a healthy (non-depressed) control group with measures of CT the findings cannot be claimed to be specific to CT in depression and the authors could make this limitation clearer. The authors claim that they may have demonstrated the bias in this group because the bias is only demonstrated in conditions such as depressed mood (discussion p13). However, they cannot really claim this without an equivalent non-depressed group. Lack of similar findings in previous studies in non-depressed subjects may relate to lack of power.

The study is small and the finding of a relationship between 3 of the subscales but not the other 2 and bias to sad faces may simply relate to power. This should be made clear.

The authors should emphasise further the limitations of a small heterogeneous sample with multiple co-morbidities and various medications. They should also comment on the relatively low HDRS scores.

However, the study is still of interest given these limitations.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'