Reviewer's report

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

**Version:** 2  
**Date:** 5 April 2015

**Reviewer:** Tamsyn Van Rheenen

**Reviewer’s report:**

The authors have sufficiently addressed most of my suggestions and I believe the manuscript is looking good. I do however, have a few more Minor Essential Revisions to be addressed prior to acceptance.

- Use the acronym MDD consistently. Current MDD is being substituted for major depression at times. Define the full term on its first use and then use the acronym thereafter.

- The use of the term ‘predictor’ on page 11 is not correct ‘Emotional abuse was the strongest predictor..’. Correlation is a measure of shared variance so they variables can only be assumed to be related, not predictive of one another. Please change to “Emotional abuse had the strongest correlation, followed by…..”

- The line “When accounting for multiple testing, the strongest correlation with emotional abuse did not differ significantly from the marginally significant correlation with emotional neglect or from the non-significant correlations with sexual and physical abuse (all ps > .04)” on Page 11 is a little confusing. Do the authors mean that there were no differences in the strengths of the correlations when tested using Steiger’s Z. If so, please clarify in the manuscript.

- I understand that the authors want to maintain consistency with past literature by mentioning the correlations between happy bias and emotional maltreatment, even though these did not survive correction. However, a whole paragraph dedicated to non-corrected results seems a bit much. One wonders what the point of correction is if the non-corrected results are going to be interpreted and emphasised anyway? If the authors wish to keep this in the discussion, I think perhaps it should be cut down and the fact that these did not survive correction needs to be emphasised.

- The authors note on Page 14 that “depression-relevant behavioural biases in maltreated individuals might be detectable only under certain circumstances, such as depressed mood or under high cognitive load”. This is an interesting suggestion given that symptoms didn’t correlate with attentional bias in the current sample.

- The authors state that no patients with ‘acute depression were included in the sample. This is inconsistent with the line “…we demonstrated a relation among
childhood maltreatment and altered attention to sad faces in acute depression” on Page 14.

- It is interesting that the mean illness duration of the sample is only 8 months, yet the mean age of the sample is 34 years. This suggests that the mean onset of depression was far later that the typical emergence of depression in late adolescence/early adulthood. How does this sample compare to other similar studies in this area?

- In the note in Table 4, do the authors mean that only regressors with $p<.01$ were included, not regressors $p<.1$?

**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