Reviewer’s report

Title: What are the factors associated with depressive symptoms among orphans and vulnerable children in Cambodia?

Version: 2 Date: 23 May 2015

Reviewer: Majed Ashy

Reviewer’s report:

This paper examines the factors associated with depressive symptoms among orphans and vulnerable children in Cambodia. The strength of this paper is that it takes into consideration factors on multiple levels which is consistent with the ecological model (cf. Belsky, 1993; Bronfenbrenner, 1970). This model classifies factors influencing the issue at hand at the individual developmental level (including biological/genetic factors, gender, age, personality, cognition, and emotional characteristics), the microsystem level (involving the individual’s proximal social environment), the exosystem level (involving experiences within the community), and the macrosystem level (involving broad national and cultural forces) (cf. Belsky, 1993; Bronfenbrenner, 1970; Ashy & Malley-Morrison, 2007). This approach is very much needed in psychiatric and psychological research in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to depression among OVC in Cambodia. This study integrated and highlighted cultural, familial, developmental, and personal factors in adequate and effective way in the literature review, the design and methods, and in the discussion of the results. In addition to risk factors such as a history of abuse and family dysfunction, the study examined protective factors such as attachment to school. The findings regarding the protective role of school attachment in OVC is a major contribution in the field.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Yes.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   Yes. The samples and the measures are well described.

Discretionary Revisions:

The study did not consider biological factors such as nutrition or neuro-developmental consequences of adverse childhood experiences.
Childhood experiences of maltreatment have been found to be associated with later neuro-developmental abnormalities in the limbic system, vermis, and corpus callosum and paper and pencil measures of limbic dysfunction has been developed and used in various studies (Teicher, Samson, Tomoda, Ashy, & Andersen, 2006). More recent studies found endocrine and neurological mediation between childhood experiences and later depression. I suggest including a review of such body of research in the literature review.

3. Are the data sound?
   Yes.

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?
   Yes.

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.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.