Reviewer’s report

Title: A school-based epidemiological field survey: difficulties in collecting psychiatric outcome data in a middle-income country

Version: 0 Date: 23 May 2017

Reviewer: Matty de Wit

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting article of an ambitious study. It discusses the difficulties in implementing such an ambitious study in a middle income country.

However, many of the issues concerning methodological difficulties as described in this article are very well known, extensively described by others, and do not require such an extensive article, in my opinion. This refers a.o. to the response rates, the pro's and con's of diagnostic instruments versus screening tools. In addition, the choice between screening and diagnostic instruments should also be based on the focus of the study and the study should be designed in a way that it is feasible to collect the planned information within the limited options of one interview.

However, the difficulties in methodology that are specific to LIMC are less well known and provide an interesting focus worth publishing. These include the extremely high turn over of phone numbers, the impossibility of home visits due to security reasons, (the lack of contact information available at the schools), the impossibility of incentives.

A few specific notes:

An additional analyses about loss-to-follow-up would improve the article. Was follow-up selective (based on scores on the K-SADS in the first wave)?

It is a bit unclear how the fact that counseling was offered at the schools, but not to those in the study, has affected the response rate. The authors describe it as an effort to engage the community, but on an individual level it seems to be an incentive not to participate.
The authors state that an outdated list of enrolled students is a bigger problem in small schools than in large schools. However, is it not more likely that the number of errors on the list is a percentage of the list and not absolute? A bit more explanation would be helpful.

There is no mention of why the choice was made to contact respondents by phone. The lack of accurate phone numbers seems to suggest other ways might be more appropriate or could be used in addition. Are letters given to the students for their care-givers or school-meetings for care-givers not an option? A description of why other options were not feasible might be useful, since these are probably also specific to LMIC.

**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.

Unable to assess

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

Unable to assess

**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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable
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