Reviewer’s report

Title: Depressive Symptoms and Negative Life Events: What Psycho-social Factors Protect or Harm Left-behind Children in China?

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Reviewer: Meekyung Han

Reviewer’s report:

* The authors need to edit the paper more carefully. Also, please use consistent terminology throughout the paper (e.g., type of migrant parents or parental migration).

* The current definition of LBC is children "left at rural residences for at least 6 months by one or both parents who migrate to work in cities." This definition needs to have a reference and be included in the abstract. In addition, what is the age range of children in this paper? I noticed that the current study had children from 7 to 17 years old (in the results section). Any specific reason for setting up this age range?

* In the abstract, the authors state that the objective of this study was "to explore the relationship between stressful life events and depressive symptoms of children left behind." This does not seem to capture the essence of this paper. Please revise the study purpose so that it corresponds to the content of the paper.

* Similarly, six different stressful life events are introduced in the results section. I understand that this presentation is based on the measure, but it would be helpful to briefly touch on the various types of life stress and their impact on depression in the literature section.

* Some references seem outdated. For example, on page 6, the authors list the following studies: Mazure (1998) and Kendler et al. (1998). Are there any more recent or updated empirical studies that support these findings? If so, including them would strengthen the paper.

* In the first paragraph on page 7, the authors cite "extensive evidence" but include only three references.

* It would be helpful to present the research questions upfront along with the study hypotheses.

* The authors seem to use the cognitive models of depression and attachment theory as the study's conceptual framework. An explanation of the framework could stand alone in a theoretical framework subsection rather than be embedded in the background section.
It was difficult to understand what study hypotheses the authors planned to test. I recommend that the authors restructure the study hypotheses in relation to the findings. The following are other suggestions for the authors to consider:

- In the second hypothesis, depression levels are hypothesized to vary with the type of parental migration. I think that this should read "depression levels among LBC" as these are the children whose parents migrated to cities.

- In the third hypothesis, the impacts of stressful life events should be greater for LBC than NLBC. Should needs to be replaced with would.

- In the fourth hypothesis, the impacts of stressful life events are expected to vary with the type of parental migration. This hypothesis could be combined with the second.

Figure 1 nicely depicts the sampling procedure.

A bit more detailed information about how the survey was implemented could be helpful. Although the students were told that they had the right to quit or not participate in the study, asking them to fill out the survey in a classroom setting with an adult figure present could appear to be coercive. Please describe how the participants were protected.

As the authors did with the Childhood Depression Inventory, they should indicate whether the Adolescent Self-Rating Life Events Checklist was validated with Chinese populations and pre-teen students. The present established measurements for maltreatment and behavior have their own cultural and conceptual (e.g., psychological maltreatment) biases. All the measures must be in Chinese, I assume. Did the authors use already-translated Chinese versions, or did they translate the measures themselves for this study? If so, what steps (e.g., translation-back translation etc.)

Also, in the presentation of the results, it should be easier for readers to understand what tests were performed, what the study hypothesis are, and what the key findings are. The current presentation of findings is confusing. Please organize the results section based on the eight study hypotheses.

The study limitations are well identified, along with the directions for future research.

The authors need to expand on how these findings can improve current policy and practices. Are there any specific recommendations for policy makers, school administrators, social service agencies and professionals, and community members? Simply put, the implications of the study need to be further explored and discussed.

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?
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Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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I am able to assess the statistics

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