Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 17 Aug 2017

Reviewer: Kirsten Hancock

Reviewer’s report:

I acknowledge that many changes have been made to the manuscript. I also note that some improvement has been made in terms of grammar, spelling, etc. However, the manuscript still needs significant modification.

I appreciate that colleagues have assisted you with language and grammar concerns, there are notable improvements. However, there are still a lot of errors throughout and as such I still feel that the authors avail themselves of professional copy editing services.

Examples of errors or poor language can be found in the following lines:

59, 62 (stressed, not stressful), 66, 68 (don’t start a sentence with 'and'), 75 (the societies?), 97, 101, 124, 156 (inconsistently not inconstantly), 166 (what’s more), 170, 183 (demographic, not demographical), 194 (at last), 217 (if they quit, not quit), 270 (factor, not factory), 294 (ethnicity, not ethic, and elsewhere), 306 (in THE countryside), 308/309 (proportion, not population), 453 (contrary to previous research, not 'on the contrary'), 465 (significantly), 485 (step into adolescence).

Several of the comments from the original review have been responded to in the response to reviewers, but not in the manuscript. Perhaps I should have been more clear, but I was asking these questions in terms of what I think readers want to see in the manuscript, not for my own curiosity.

In particular, comment 2 about half the sample being excluded. I still struggle to understand (as will your readers), why nearly 5680 students who consented to be included in the survey didn't complete all surveys. Of these non-completing students, at which point did study withdrawal become a problem. Did they get tired and not fill in the last few questionnaires? Was there one survey module in particular that students struggled with? You could, for example, expand on figure 1 to highlight how many of those 5,680 completed each module. These are issues that must be addressed in your manuscript.

Similarly, the comment about how the 67% of the sample being LBC and how this compares to other studies. You have provided useful information, a brief comment should go in the manuscript.
Also, the detail on the lodging details (your response to comment 4 in the results) should also go in the manuscript. Ideally, you would present the variable as a 'usual residence' type variable that includes different levels including school, mother, father, grandparents and other relatives.

I appreciate the inclusion of effect sizes in your results and this is an important addition. More broadly, I struggle to follow many of the analyses. Table 4 in particular - why are there so many different models? Why are SS and MS values reported, this is very unusual. A more straightforward and intuitive approach would be a single regression model estimating depression scores (like you have in Table 6) from type of parental migration, other variables of interest (e.g. age, duration of separation) and the interaction between migration type and variables of interest. If the interactions are not statistically significant, they either don't need to be reported, or can be dropped from the model using an argument of wanting to present the most parsimonious model.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

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

No

**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.

I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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