Author’s response to reviews

Title: Attempted suicide of ethnic minority girls with a Caribbean and Cape Verdean background: Rates and risk factors

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editorial board members,

We thank the reviewers and handling editor for their careful reading of, and helpful suggestions for improving our manuscript. Below you will find our specific response to each comment.

Kind wishes,

Dr. Diana van Bergen, also on behalf of all co-authors

Reviewer reports:

Alberto Bocchetta (Reviewer 1): This is an interesting paper on attempted suicide in Dutch adolescent girls.

However, the discussion and conclusion are not consistent with the results shown:

a) Indeed, the principal data regard the "native" Dutch girls;

We are not entirely sure what the reviewer means by this comment. We have revised the spelling of natives to ‘natives’ throughout the manuscript.
b) some important risk factors (sexual abuse and emotional problems) are independent of ethnicity (Table 3 and 4);

We have incorporated this in the discussion. See page 12:

“Next, important risk indicators such as emotional problems and sexual abuse were associated with an elevated level of attempted suicide in both ‘native’ and Caribbean groups.”

c) not living with two biological parents is a risk factor only for "native " Dutch girls, as is in part aggressive behaviour (Table 3 and 4);

We have incorporated this in the discussion. See page 12 and 13:

“Next, girls living in Caribbean- or Cape-Verdean Dutch families not composed of a biological father and mother (highly common for these ethnic groups) were not at heightened for suicidal behaviour, while ‘native’ girls in households without two biological parents were more at risk for suicidality”.

d) as the majority of ethnic minority girls have a low educational level (Table 1), I suggest to show a comparison with "native" Dutch girls of a similar educational level. In this case, the differences across ethnic groups vanish (Dutch 287/2018 = 14.2%; Creole-Surinamese 16/99 = 16.2%; Antillean 44/320 = 13.7%).

We thank the reviewer for this suggestion, we have incorporated this suggestion on page 11:

“Furthermore, when comparing only those girls from all four ethnic groups who were enrolled in vocational educational tracks, levels of attempted suicide were not significantly elevated anymore in the ethnic minority groups compared to the Dutch ‘native’ group (Dutch, 14.2 per cent, Creole-Surinamese 16.3 per cent, Antillean 13.6 per cent, Cape Verdean 8.7 per cent) (not presented in table).”

Conclusion

The present study indicates that the apparently increased propensity to suicidal behaviour of Caribbean Dutch girls compared to Dutch native girls can be explained by their differences in socio-economic status and education…..

….Therefore, the impact of social class disadvantages and demographic features underpins the need for suicide prevention programs that would target socio-economic and educational disparities in both native and Caribbean Dutch groups.
We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer in the conclusion.

Additional remarks

There are several citations of differences between ethnic groups defined by their skin colour. I understand that this is due the administrative classifications commonly used in the US and UK. There are reports of how such classifications are not scientifically appropriate (for example Bhopal and Donaldson. White, European, Western, Caucasian, or what? Inappropriate labelling in research on race, ethnicity, and health. Am J Public Health. 1998 Sep;88(9):1303-7). I would remark such an inappropriate labelling by quotation marks (as already done by the authors by citing … single-parent families "western style"…) or using other terms (for example: … studies among its majority ("white") populations….; ...."Black British" women aged 16 to 34 ….; … In the US, African-American young females … compared to comparison young US women (Eaton et al., 2011); …reported among "black" female adolescents European populations ….; "Black British" girls (Maynard, Harding & Minnis…).

We have incorporated this suggestion by the reviewer. References to skin colour (indeed a result of administrative classifications commonly used in the US and the UK) are now presented between brackets.

Yovanska Duarte-Velez (Reviewer 2):

The manuscript titled, "Attempted suicide of ethnic minority girls with a Caribbean and Cape Verdean background: Rates and risk factors" aims to increase knowledge about rates and risk factors among these populations in comparison with Dutch native girls. In general, this is a great contribution to the limited studies in this area. I have some minor editing corrections and some other suggestions that could improve the manuscript.

1. Abstract: line 19, clarify since the beginning who you are referring to by Caribbean with a parenthesis after the word Caribbean - (Antillean-Dutch & Creole-Surinamese-Dutch).

   We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer.

2. Page 6, line 7: add the word "among" after exists, should said, "also exists among…"

   We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer.

3. Page 6, line 19: word "In" I should be in lower case.
We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer.

4. Page 6, line 22: should have the word "and" after trauma, should said, "sexual trauma, and emotional and externalizing…"

We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer.

5. Page 7: Ethnicity, please add the questions about ethnicity that the youth answered when you refer to "self-identification" to understand better the categorization by ethnicity. Is a little confusing.

We have added more explanation on the classification of ethnicity on page 7, which now reads:

“The ethnicity of the youngsters was established by using the country of birth of the father and mother. However, three exceptions existed: Girls with a mixed ethnic background, third generation immigrant girls, and Creole-Surinamese girls (since the Surinamese population consists of a number of ethnic subgroups) could only be identified through ethnic self-identification in the dataset. This was done through the item “Which group do you identify mostly with?” 1. Dutch 2. Surinamese 3. Surinamese/Creole 4. Surinamese/ South Asian 5. Antillean or Aruban 6. Moroccan 7. Turkish 8. Cape Verdean 9. Other. Thus, respondents considered to be part of the aforementioned exceptional three cases were categorized as minorities only when youngsters self-identified mostly with the specific minority culture. Third generation immigrant youth concerned 6 Antillean Dutch youth and one Cape Verdean Dutch youth.”

6. Page 7, line 34: you should eliminate the word "to" after the word never, should said, "never, once, or more than once".

We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer.

7. Independent variables section (page 7-8): Add a period. After each subheading in italic.

We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer.
8. Emotional problems variable - Please provide the range of the scale and the direction of the score (e.g. Score range from 0 to 9 with higher value meaning increase in emotional problems.) Is difficult to understand table 1 and 3 without this specifications. Why there is a range from 0 to 100 when is just 9 items with yes or no options? If a higher score means increase in emotional problems, seems that teens with suicidal attempts had lower emotional problems (table 3).

We thank the reviewer for this suggestion. The explanation on this variable has been elaborated and now reads:

“Emotional problems were examined with 9 items of a shortened version of the Child Health Questionnaire (Landgraf & Abetz, 1997). The items relate to the presence of certain feelings in the past four weeks (e.g. loneliness, pleasure, depressed mood, self-image, anxiety and worrying). Each item is scored on a 5-point likert scale ranging from very often to never. A total sumscore is calculated, which varies between 0 - 100 (a higher score means fewer emotional problems). Chronbach’s alpha of the scale was 0.86”.

9. "Educational Track" variable - Please add some additional, brief general information describing what means to be in each track. Does this means less years studying in high school or just the complexities of the content of the courses? Is there any relationship between the educational track chosen and socio-economic status or parent education?

We thank the reviewer for this suggestion. The explanation on this variable has been elaborated and now reads:

“Several types of education exist in Dutch secondary school: a ‘vocational track’ (=1) which takes four years and where students focus particularly on acquiring vocational skills. The university track (=3) is a six year long theoretical program which prepares students for a study at university. The general continued education program (‘middle track’=2) prepares students for continued education for professional degrees at college level, and takes five years. Students enrolled in vocational tracks often have parents belonging to lower socio-economic strata.”

In addition, we made a few changes to the language used for this variable (not requested by the reviewers, added by authors)

Educational tracks” low, middle high is potentially stigmatizing language. We changed this into “vocational track” “middle track” and “university track”.
10. "Socioeconomic status" variable - provide an explanation of the scale used in order to understand better the outcomes.

We have extended the part concerning the “Socio-economic status” variable in the methods section in the following way:

“The postal code of respondents was used as a proxy for socioeconomic class, since no other information was available from the survey regarding this element. Factor scores that link the postal code to socioeconomic class were available from the National Statistics Office. These factor scores are based on a scale of items, e.g., income, hours of work, and educational level”.

11. Tables: Table 3, include a note like this, "Note. SA = suicide attempt". According to APA style, each table should have the word "Note." for the comments below each table.

We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer.

12. Table 4: Words "Multivariate analyses of" are in regular font, should be italic.

We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer.

13. Discussion section, page 12 (line 31-46): This is a very important finding that needs to be discussed a little more according to the social context of these populations in Netherlands. What is the importance that when controlling for socio-demographics and other risk factors the elevated risk disappear? What is this telling us about the social circumstances of these groups of immigrants? What is telling us about their resilience and possible protective factors?

We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer, please see our updated discussion and conclusion.

14. Conclusion, page 12, line 58: Eliminate the work "and" after girls.

We have incorporated the suggestion by the reviewer.