Reviewer’s report


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Reviewer: Abebaw Fekadu

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BPSY-D-17-00575

Thank you for asking me to review this paper. The paper attempts to look at the pattern of completed and attempted suicide among Amerindians in the French Guiana over a period of eight years (2008-2015) using medical records. The authors also explore qualitatively, in a subset of attempters, factors that may have led to the attempts. The paper reports of a comparatively higher rate of suicides among the study population compared to the report from France. The authors also report increase in suicide in the study population in the last three years of the study.

Below are general and specific comments

A. General comments
1. The study confirms the pattern of risk behaviour and risk factors, such as substance abuse, among such populations. Although the study may be relevant for this particular population, I did not find anything unique in the study design or the findings. There is a degree of 'hyperbole' in the report, for example when the authors refer to 'epidemic' of suicide.
2. The study is likely to be limited significantly by ascertainment bias given the subject matter of the study and the reliance of the researchers on clinical records.
3. The report would benefit from English editing.

B. Specific comments
1. Abstract:
a. Abstract background begins by providing suicide rates among 13-18 year olds. The rationale for this is unclear. What would be more appropriate, given the study is a general population
study, is to provide the rate for the general population, if available. If not, to state so. The term 'epidemic' is too strong to use. And I have not seen evidence in the report to substantiate the claim. Less strong terms need to be considered. Or the use of the word epidemic needs to be substantiated with the data.

b. Provide the exact figure in addition to or instead of the per 100,000 figure. In the context of a small denominator, as seems to be the case here, the per 100,000 figure is likely to be big. It would also help the reader the actual size of the population in the abstract.

c. The word 'Reiteration' in the abstract is not clear. I presume this refers to repetition of suicide attempts

d. Conclusion: A concise description of what is unique about this study would be useful. The statement that 'the circumstances associated with suicidality are potential levers of intervention for the Amerindian community' seems not so relevant because no unique circumstances are presented in the abstract (or the main body of the report for that matter).

2. Introduction
   a. Introduction
      i. Line 30/31: suggest using the word 'under-estimated' for 'under evaluated'
      ii. Either here in the introduction, or the methods section, detailed description of the Amerindian population, and why the population was chosen for the study needs to be described.

3. 'Patients and methods'
   a. I recommend using the phrase 'participants and methods' or simply 'methods' instead of 'patients and methods' as a heading for this section.
   b. Line 3/4: the acronym RP is not clear.
   c. Exclusion criteria: how were accidental deaths distinguished from deaths due to suicide?
   d. How were suicide attempters identified? I know medical records were used. But was it that all medical records of the eight years of study assessed? What is the nature of the medical records? Were they electronic, paper or other? Who assessed the medical records? What was the qualification and training of these assessors?
   e. Questionnaire: It is not clear how the questionnaire was developed. What is the content of the questionnaire? How many interviewers and what qualifications? How was reliability of the
questionnaire assessed? This is particularly important if the interviewers were free to "reformulate" the questions.
f. Outcome: how was the outcome of suicide and suicide attempt ascertained? For example, was it required that the medical records needed to state explicitly these outcomes?
g. Page 5, line 5/6: sentence could be clearer if 'it' was substituted for 'and'
h. Authors seem to have interest to look at trend over time. If that is the case, they may consider trend analysis.

4. Result
a. In relation to 2015, it is stated that 296/100,000 deaths had occurred. As indicated in the abstract, it is important to provide the absolute number of deaths. And also the absolute denominator would be helpful.
b. Incidentally, the paper refers to 2015 as 'last year'. Omit the reference for 'last year'.
c. The subheading on age also refers to sex. Consider changing the subtitle. Additionally, percentages may be unintentionally misleading with small denominators. Please provide absolute numbers too.
d. Does the reference to n=55 include suicide completers? In that case, please indicate.
e. 'Reiteration': repetition may be a more appropriate term
f. P6 refers to alcohol dependence. How was this ascertained?

5. Discussion
a. The main limitations are to do with case ascertainment, questionnaire development and administration and outcome ascertainment. I recommend that authors refer to these as limitations.

6. Conclusion
a. Conclusion somewhat reads as a summary of the results. But it should be a reflection of the authors on the most important findings and their implications.
b. The statement that "There are determinants linked to the individual and to culture." This statement may be interpreted in several ways. Please make it clear.
c. The language in some places is dramatic: "We have thus witnessed a suicide epidemic with increasing suicide rates, reaching striking levels". How was epidemic defined? I suggest using simpler terms indicating increased rates in the population would communicate the message.

d. Please make sure to include data based discussion/conclusion points in the results section. For example, the reference to spirits, voices

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.
No

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

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

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