Reviewer’s report

Title: Are left-behind families of migrant workers at increased risk of attempted suicide? – A cohort study of 178,000+ individuals in Sri Lanka

Version: 0 Date: 06 Oct 2018

Reviewer: Lay San Too

Reviewer's report:

The study used prospective cohort data to examine whether the risk of suicide attempt was greater in family members of migrants compared with those of non-migrants, and whether the risk varied by sex of migrant and by age and sex of their family members. The authors have used a thoughtful analysis and addressed a neglected topic. The study makes a novel contribution to the field.

The paper is recommended for publication after some minor revisions/clarifications:

1. Abstract - Background: please provide information on the knowledge gap i.e. no study has examined whether the risk of suicidal behaviours is greater in family members of migrants than those of non-migrants.

2. Abstract - Methods: The first two sentences could be clearer, something like this: We used baseline data from a large randomised controlled trial in Sri Lanka (n=178,730, 8% households with a current temporary foreign migrant) and data on hospital presentation due to a suicide attempt up to five years after baseline. Using multilevel Poisson regression models, we investigated whether the risk of suicide attempt was greater in family members of migrants compared to those of non-migrants, and whether the risk varied by sex of migrant and by age and sex of their family members.

3. Introduction - Background: please provide some lines on the knowledge gap and why it is important to do the study.

4. Methods - participants: could the authors give more details on the trial e.g., the purpose of the trial? When did it take place? Would the trial influence suicide attempt risk during the follow-up period?

5. Methods - outcome: Given low-skilled workers often migrate for 2-3 years, could the authors perform a sensitivity analysis by including only suicide attempts occurred during the first three years after baseline?
6. Methods - outcome: please show the number and % of suicides identified. Please indicate how did the field team select the 25% of households? Did they also ask about suicide?

7. Methods - potential confounders/modifiers/mediators: please clearly indicate what variables were considered as confounders and what variables were considered as modifiers. Household size was not shown in Table 1 but was included as a confounder. Please show household size in Table 1. Please also adjust for the frequency at home in the analysis as this could be a potential confounder.

8. Please change 'respondent-reported' to 'self-reported' (a more commonly used term).

9. Please clarify 'intervention arm' under Table 2 and 3 as this was not mentioned in the text.

10. Results: it would be easier to read the results if the authors use subheading in the section e.g., cohort characteristics, suicide attempt risk and migrant status/sex of migrant etc.

11. The discussion is well-written. However, please clarify internal and international migrations.

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.

Yes

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

Acceptable

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