Reviewer’s report

Title: Personal values in adolescence and suicidality: A cross-sectional study based on a retrospective recall

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Reviewer: Lars-Gunnar Lundh

Reviewer’s report:

The present study examines the association between personal values in adolescence and suicidality in a sample of adults in Japan. Data on suicidality were taken from wave 1 (2010) and retrospective data on personal values in adolescence were taken from wave 3 (2017) of the Japanese Study on Stratification, Health, Income, and Neighborhood (J-SHINE) survey. Multivariate logistic regression analysis was used to estimate the association of personal values in adolescence with self-reported suicidal ideation, suicidal planning and suicide attempt. The results show that the value of cherishing family and friends were significantly and negatively associated with suicidal ideation in lifetime and "in the past time", and that commitment to values was significantly and negatively associated with suicidal ideation "in the past time". The authors conclude that cherishing family and friends and commitment to values in adolescence might reduce the suicidality in the future.

The research question is interesting and important. But I do have some concerns about the methodology and the conclusions.

1. The retrospective assessment of values is a large limitation. Suicidality was measured at wave 1 (2010) when the participants seem to have been 20-50 years old (mean age 38.1). Personal values at age 15 were measured retrospectively in 2017 (i.e., seven years later, when the participants were probably at an average 45 years old). This means, if I have understood it correctly, that adolescent values were measured in retrospect at an average 25 years later. This raises the question what kind of hindsight biases that may possibly be at work here. This needs to be discussed.

2. The authors do not sufficiently discuss alternative explanations of their findings. As they point out, their findings are consistent with interpersonal theories of suicidality. But they go too far in their conclusions when they make statements like the following: "Therefore, cherishing family and friends worked protectively on thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness, which weakened suicidal ideation" (p. 9); "Commitment to values worked protectively against suicidal ideation in the past time" (p. 9); and "the present study indicated that cherishing family and friends and commitment to values in adolescence may reduce the risk of suicidal ideation" (p. 11). These conclusions imply causality, but no such conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the present kind correlational data.
The authors need to discuss possible alternative explanations. For example, could it be that the presence of suicidal ideation has an impact on one's values, and could suicidality have an effects on one's commitment to these values? Or could suicidality involve memory biases that have an effect on which kind of values are reconstructed from memories of adolescence, 25 years earlier?

Or would it be possible that both suicidal ideation and lower cherishing of family and friends can be caused by negative experiences in the family (e.g., abuse)?

3. Some minor concerns:

a. What does "the past time" mean?

b. The response rate at wave 1 was 31.3%; and at wave 3 there was a response rate of 74.7 among those who had responded at both wave 1 and wave 2. I can find no attrition analysis.

c. The participants' age are reported as 20-50 years, with a mean age of 38.1, but it is not stated explicitly at what time point (Wave 1 or Wave 3).

d. The English language needs careful checking.

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

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I am able to assess the statistics

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