Reviewer's report
Title: Substance use and self-harm: a cross-sectional study of the prevalence, correlates and patterns of medical service utilisation among patients admitted to a South African hospital

Version: 0 Date: 07 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Arvin Bhana

Reviewer's report:
Page 3, lines 35-40. The term "acute use of substances" needs to be explained in greater detail. Simply indicating that it refers to substance use during or after self-harm does not help determine whether consumption of substances is at a risky level (in the case of alcohol), or what quantity or type of other illicit substances would be considered to qualify as "acute use"! An important question is whether 'acute' use of substances has been present without suicidal behavior previously? It would appear from the analysis that this question was not asked though 'history of self-harm' was asked. Given that just under 50% of the sample had a history of self-harm, an important discriminating question would have been about substance use patterns of behavior! Unfortunately, the details of the measures used indicates that only data related to substance use at the time of the self-harm was collected.

Page 3, lines 38-40. This text should be in the methods section
Page 8, line 145-148. The PSIS scores ranging from 0-11 indicates low to moderate suicidal intent. This makes little sense as the one reflects low risk and the other moderate risk. Needs to be clarified.

Results: While the statistical analysis is appropriate, it is not surprising that there were no significant associations found on the key outcome variables. It would appear that more careful conceptual consideration of the variable acute use of substances may have suggested that a pattern of substance use may be a better predictor related to self-harm. I suggest that the authors consider this issue and the ways in which it may have limited the usefulness of the study itself. The discussion section, page 14: lines 279-281 indicate as much, though it is unclear what is meant by 'chronic substance use'!
Discussion Section: Given the cross-sectional nature of this study and the absence of significant findings on the key outcome variables, it is inappropriate to discuss the findings as if they were significant! A more nuanced approach that suggests trends rather than positive findings should form the focus of the discussion. The discussion section appears to overstate the significance of the findings! An example is page 15, lines 311-315. The study itself did not evaluate if screening is appropriate for self-harm patients, nor does the data suggest this as it was not significant!

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.
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:
Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?
2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?
3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal

Do you want to get recognition for reviewing this manuscript?

Add a record of this review to track and showcase your reviewing expertise across the world’s journals. Signing up is quick, easy and free!
Yes