Reviewer’s report

Title: Associations between social isolation, pro-social behaviour and emotional development in pre-school aged children: a population based survey of kindergarten staff.

Version: 2 Date: 13 March 2014

Reviewer: Stella Mavroveli

Reviewer’s report:

This article utilises cohort data to examine social isolation and socio-emotional development in preschool children. The key variables are based on kindergarten staff reports and are assessed through the SDQ. Some demographic information is also considered. I do find the topic interesting with wide-ranging implications. However, the manuscript does not match to my expectations.

Major Compulsory Revisions
First, the whole paper is thinly based on a one-page introduction, when the literature on children socio-emotional development is abundant. As a result, the rationale is feeble to non-existent.

The authors should follow some sort of conventions for manuscript preparation, such as APA etc, as the Method section is especially problematic (structure, statistics reporting, tables etc). Bias analysis is needed as well given that there is great number of missing data.

Given that the data were great in terms of numbers, I would suggest that the authors consider the multilevel nature (area, nursery etc.) and use a more suitable statistical package, such as MLwiN for multilevel modelling.

The discussion reads more like a results section with an extensive narrative on limitations. What are the implications and applications of this work? Also, given that this work is based on the SDQ only, the scale has potential as a screening instrument for that age and this could be mentioned. Overall, the major issue relates to the absence of family-level data and the reliance on a single teacher-rated measure. However, the large number of data and other demographic characteristics could compensate for this had the authors structured the paper around a robust and coherent argument and had they analysed the data using a more appropriate statistical package, such as MLwiN.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests