Author's response to reviews

Title: Suicidal tendencies and attitude towards freedom to choose suicide among Lithuanian schoolchildren: results from three cross-sectional studies in 1994, 1998, and 2002

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Author’s response to reviews


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Authors’ response to reviews

Dear Editors:

We are especially grateful for the reviewers for deep analysis and useful suggestions for an improvement of the paper. We have revised our paper in accordance to the provided comments very seriously and carefully. As a result, we checked our data as well, and have made numerous grammatical and stylistic corrections. Our responses to the reviewers’ comments are detailed below.

A. Overall this project has very exciting results and this data is gold. Unfortunately the impact of the magnitude of the project is lost in poorly organized, unclear writing. Some significant writing revisions are needed.

Response: We have made a careful language revision of the paper according to your comments and recommendations, and hope that now our writing is organized more clearly.

B. The study analyses representative samples at 3 different times. This design only allows for correlational studies. Therefore, the use of “predictor” in the conclusion (abstract) is not appropriate, and should be correlate (in our opinion).

Response: We agree, that the use of the word “predictor” was not relevant to the performed analysis, that is why, we replaced it with “correlate”.

C. The term “Risk of Suicide” implies that individuals in the high risk group will have higher rates of suicide. Although this may be, it is speculative. Maybe “High level of Suicidality” is a better term.

Response: Agreeably to your suggestion, we tried to find more exact terms and decided to use the following classification: “Non suicidal”, “Low level of suicidality” and “High level of suicidality”.

D. In discussing causal links between attitude towards suicide and risk for suicide, it may be useful to provide data showing rates of suicide in young people during the study period, i.e., 1994-2002, and discuss any differences or trends.

Response: Yes, we agree that the data showing the rates of suicide among young people during the study period should help to form more clear view of the investigated subject and included the following paragraph with a reference to literature in the background part of the article:

“It is important to note, that our investigation was conducted in the period between 1990 and 1996 when suicide mortality in Lithuania rose 82.4%, with the rate peaking at more than 47 per 100,000 persons in 1996. After a slight decrease in 1997 (to 45.6) and in 1998 (to 43.8), suicide rates stabilized at a very high level (in 1998-2002 the average rate was 44.6) [4].”

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
Methods-Measures

The description of the groups is unclear, the authors describe those without suicide tendencies as having stated that they have never thought about suicide, and describes those having suicide tendencies as those who have had any suicidal thoughts at all. Simply having suicidal thoughts does not mean the participants had tendencies. If the authors feel the need to divide these responses into groups, appropriate labels should be applied. Perhaps those with and without suicide ideation would be more accurate. Thus corrections of the word tendencies which implies behaviours throughout the document seem warranted.

Response: Your remark about our unclear subdivision into groups is quite to the point. On the other hand, we still think it to be appropriate to divide respondents by their responses into the following groups: 1. ‘Non suicidal’, 2. ‘Low level of suicidality’ and 3. ‘High level of suicidality’. Our decision was made on the ground of the further analysis which showed that there are differences among those three groups.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Abstract-Background
1) The author wrote, suicidal behavior is increasingly becoming a phenomenon… It would be more clear to write… suicidal behavior is becoming a phenomenon increasingly.

Response: Done

2) Throughout the document the authors fail to place the and a before nouns often times violating parallelism in writing. It reads like a shorthand method of writing, but interrupts flow. For example, the author wrote… becoming a phenomenon associated with young people and important public health issue in Lithuania, adding an before important would create more clarity and would create parallelism. There are several other sentences throughout the manuscript with the same problem.

Response: Done

3) The authors say that finding out the relationship among the variables associated with suicidal ideation and threats in the normal population WILL eventually result in better understanding of the more serious forms of adolescent suicidal behaviour. The word WILL seems too strong, you may consider replacing it with MAY.

Response: Done

4) In this paragraph you discuss your variables as attitude and behavior but change the order to behavior and attitude in later sentences. Its more clear to keep them in the same order.

Response: We accepted your remark and made the suggested changes.

Abstract-Results
5) For some variables you report percentages and others you do not, be consistent.

Response: Done

6) The authors wrote.. the number of suicidal attempts increased from 1.0% in 1994 to 1.8% in the year 1998, and to 1.7% in the year 2002. However, the attempts did not increase each year only between 1994 and 1998. It might be better to say they changed rather than increased. The same is true of the same sentence in the results section of the article.

Response: Done
7) The use of the word favourable is questionable and will be discussed in the Results section of the review.

Response: We decided to use the word “agreeable” instead of “favourable”

Background

8) The first two sentences of the second paragraph are unclear and poorly worded for understanding.

Response: Done. We have made some changes in the structure.

9) Halfway through the first second paragraph the word conceptualise is misspelled.

Response: Done

10) The authors wrote, As it is stated in the literature, this issue is important in assessing risk for suicide. The authors might clarify what this issue is and might want to explain how or why it is important for more clarity.

Response: We explained this issue more properly.

11) The last paragraph the first sentence discusses the study’s aim and would be more accurate to describe adolescents as Lithuanian adolescents.

Response: Done

12) The last sentence is in passive voice and would be more powerful in active voice.

Response: Done

Methods-Subjects and Study Procedures

13) It might be more appropriate to discuss those involved in the study as participants rather than subjects, but that’s up to the author stylistically and the journal.

Response: It was done.

14) At the end of the first paragraph is another incident of passive voice.

Response: Done. We wrote the sentence in active voice.

15) The third paragraph contains the word, striven which seems awkward and interrupts flow.

Response: We changed the structure of the sentence.

16) Instead of saying the participants, filled in questionnaires, completed seems appropriate.

Response: Done

Methods-Measures

17) Good inclusion of questions, it allows the reader to know exactly what you are talking about when you discuss suicide later in your manuscript.

Response: We agree.

18) Good reverse translation strategy to increase methodological rigor.

Response: This issue was included into the study protocol.

19) The first sentence of the last paragraph needs the word of after the word actions.
Response: Done

Results
20) 2nd to the last sentence of the first paragraph states, in the period of the last four years, authors should list years, last four years from present day or some time period of study?

Response: We have made the suggested correction.

21) First sentence of second paragraph states that prevalence rates are at the same high level. The authors need to compare this to other percentages from other samples or anchor these numbers in some way. Explain why 8% is high.

Response: From our point of view, if 8% of such young teenagers (aged 11, 13 and 15) report frequent thoughts, plans and attempts to commit suicide, the prevalence suicidality is really high. It means that approximately every tenth teenager at this age could be assigned to the group of high level of suicidality.

22) The third sentence states that, according to the data, the problem of suicide is vivid already in young age, especially boys. It is unclear if the authors mean suicide ideation or completion by the word suicide since previous sentences addressed ideation. The word vivid is unclear and awkward. If the authors are discussing ideation in this sentence then the gender information is contradictory to the previous sentence in the paragraph, if they are talking about completion it would be good to clarify that.

Response: Done

23) Authors discuss a decrease in prevalence but fail to address as compared to whom. The last sentence of this paragraph also fails to address what is meant by same level and what is meant by indicators.

Response: We made the required correction.

24) The second half of the second to last paragraph in the result section is entirely too long and is very unclear.

Response: We rewrote this part of the work.

25) Also the authors might consider organizing the results according to hypotheses and utilizing headers for a clear read of a long results section, although this is a stylistic preference.

Response: We included the labels for a clear read.

Discussion
26) The first sentence of the second paragraph states, findings of anonymous questioners and I am sure the authors meant questionnaires.

Response: Done.

27) At some times the authors write-out the words for the ages of the participants, other times they use the numbers. Consistency is preferred.

Response: We made the suggested changes.

28) First sentence of the third paragraph uses the words allow proposing another word, perhaps, indicate might be more clear.

Response: Done
29) The second sentence of the third paragraph mentions positive changes but fails to explain them.
Response: We included the explanation.

30) The phrase fifth formers boys is new in the document and is unclear to the reader.
Response: We considered this remark and made the necessary changes.

31) The last sentence of the third paragraph contains the word percents which I believe should be percent.
Response: Done.

32) The first sentence of the third paragraph from the end of the discussion describes children as having adopted a very tolerant view of suicide. I’m not sure the word tolerant accurately describes your findings. Perhaps an increased acceptance of the choice or right to commit suicide would be more accurate. Tolerant of suicide seems different than thinking someone has the choice to this reviewer. The next sentence the authors discuss how the view of suicide has credibly grown which is a much better descriptor than tolerant. Also the authors should discuss credibly by quantifying or qualifying what this means.
Response: We made some changes in the organization of the sentence as well as put in some numbers, to make our discussion more clear.

33) In the middle of the last paragraph, the use of these results are consistent with… is unclear. The reviewer is not sure of what results the authors are referencing. The previous sentence does not lend itself well to a these.
Response: We replaced the demonstrative pronoun ‘these’ with the personal pronoun ‘our’ to make the sentence more clear.

34) The limitations of the study would be better in their own paragraph.
Response: Done

Respectfully,

Authors