Reviewer's report

**Title:** What are the risk factors for the comorbidity of posttraumatic stress disorder and depression? A cross-sectional community study of a war-affected population in South Sudan

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 25 June 2012

**Reviewer:** Bayard Roberts

**Reviewer's report:**

This is an impressive and important study and the authors are to be commended for conducting the research in extremely challenging conditions. The study measures levels of PTSD and depression and PTSD-depression comorbidity and their associated trauma and socio-demographic factors in Greater Bahr el Ghazal States, South Sudan. There is a major lack of evidence on mental health needs in South Sudan and the study represents an important contribution.

There are a number of fairly minor recommendations that could be addressed to help further strengthen the paper.


2. **Background:** More information on the Greater Bahr el Ghazal States would be helpful to add some greater contextual information on the study area (e.g. location in South Sudan, overall population, main ethnic groups and languages, urban/rural distribution).

3. **Methods:** What was the rationale for choosing just 9 bomas out of the 30? This implies that it was actually 9 clusters (not 30). This should be clarified and justified?

4. **Methods:** Is Arab the dominant language in the study sites? Did the authors consider any other languages for delivering the questionnaire (as well as Arabic)?

5. **Methods:** The cut-off points used for the 3 study instruments in the study should be stated.

6. **Methods:** The authors should that the statistical analysis adjusted for the clustered survey design (which it should have done).
7. Methods: The authors should give the cronbach alpha results for the internal reliability of the 3 study instruments.

8. Results (page 10 bottom/page 11 top): The sentence beginning ‘the rate of PTSD only...should put the % before the frequency (e.g. 28.1% (N=331) as the sentence is presenting rates.

9. Results (page 14, paragraph 3, line 2): This sentence is not clear. Instead of “but were...”, could be written “, with co-morbidity also associated with...”

10. Results: Table 1. It would be helpful to present confidence intervals (at least for the mental health outcome variables) to get a sense of the precision of results.

11. Results: Table 1. The authors should clarify the time period of the household income variable.

12. Discussion: it is written that one of the study team had to provide emergency assistance (page 16). Was this for mental health? If not, I’m not sure it’s worth mentioning.

13. Discussion. In the limitation section, the authors should acknowledge the wide confidence intervals on many of the statistically significant regression results (as this limit the precision of interpretation).

14. Discussion: The authors claim that the findings could possibly be generalised to the whole of South Sudan. Epidemiologically, this is not the case. Instead, the authors could state that the findings, when related to other studies elsewhere in South Sudan, indicate extremely high levels of poor mental health in South Sudan.

15. Discussion. The recommendations for policy and future research could be strengthened. Given the high rates of mental disorders and psychological distress observed in this and other studies in South Sudan and the huge lack of mental health services in the country, the authors should highlight the urgent need for appropriate mental health services in South Sudan. It may also be helpful if the authors noted whether mental health services are included in the South Sudan’s Basic Package of Health services (the main mechanism for delivering healthcare in South Sudan). If they are not, the authors may wish to consider recommending that they should be. If they are, is there any evidence on whether they are actually being implemented? The authors may also wish to include some suggestions for priority mental health research issues in South Sudan.

I congratulate the authors on the study and wish them luck in their future work in South Sudan.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests