Reviewer's report

Title: Internalized stigma among patients with schizophrenia in Ethiopia: a cross-sectional facility-based study

Version: 2 Date: 21 October 2012

Reviewer: Jamie Ringer

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The authors of the article, "Internalized stigma among patients with schizophrenia in Ethiopia: a cross-sectional facility-based study," have made improvements to the manuscript in this second revision. The introduction is much improved. Still, some questions remain regarding the methods of the study which require better explanation prior to publication.

Major revisions

It's difficult to ascertain the actual steps of the study. For example, the authors report administering the ISMI, but it's not clear whether was it given to the participants after being translated, read to the patients, or “observer rated” which was stated in the response letter but not in the manuscript itself. “A: THE ISMI WAS OBSERVER-RATED (COMPLETED BY SENIOR PSYCHIATRIC RESIDENTS). WE HOPE THIS IS NOW MORE EXPLICIT.” The term “observer rated” is interpreted as being completed by the rater without the patient’s input, but with the population being 90% literate and the nature of the questionnaire, being rated in this way would not seem appropriate.

Under the section: Prevalence of Internalized Stigma, the authors report that patients experienced stigma within the family, neighborhood, and occasional disrespect from mental health staff. Where did this information come from? Specific sources of stigma are not measured on the ISMI, so was an interview additionally done? If so, this should be described in the methods section.

In the same section, please clarify the first sentence: “participants admitted experiencing at least one form of stigma at the time of interview”…what “forms” are being referred to?

In the discussion section, the authors state that a high burden of internalized stigma is demonstrated and support this by the statement that three quarter of patients endorsed strongly at least one stigma item…can it really be said that the burden is high based on people strongly agreeing on 1 of 24 questions? This statement should be backed by stronger statistical evidence.

In addition, at what point was informed consent sought? Prior to the chart review for eligibility or prior to administration of the ISMI, etc?

The authors have still not fully explained their exclusion of persons with “impaired
insight.” How was insight level determined? And since lack of insight is a common problem in persons with schizophrenia, why were these individuals excluded? The authors explain that they feared these patients may lack capacity to give consent, but insight into illness and capacity to make decisions are separate issues. This exclusion should have also been mentioned in the participants section of the methods with the other inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Discretionary Revisions

Under the methodology section, there is a heading for participants, yet the majority of the data on participants is found later under the heading "socio-demographic and clinical characteristics." It would be helpful for the authors to combine these sections and seems more appropriately found in the methods section than in the results.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.