Author's response to reviews

Title: Perceived causes of severe mental illness and preferred interventions by the Borana semi-nomadic population in southern Ethiopia: a qualitative study

Authors:

Solomon Teferra (soloteferra@yahoo.com)
Teshome Shibre (shibreteshome@yahoo.com)

Version: 5 Date: 2 June 2012

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

I took the pleasure of taking your suggestions into consideration when I made the revision. I will be making a point-by-point reply to the reviewer’s comment below.

Best regards

Solomon Teferra, MD, PhD

Comment from the reviewer:

This study is much improved with revision. There are a few outstanding issues, however, that if addressed, would greatly improve the paper:

1. The authors should consider the potential biases of their purposive selection procedure - it focused on community leaders which was intended - but can we be sure that the "ordinary" women and men would agree with these perspectives? For example, is it not possible that the leaders or key informants will be "protective" of the existing traditional system - whereas the rank and file might be more critical of it?

Answer: We mentioned this in the limitation section of the manuscript. Although the leaders emphasize the role of indigenous practices, they were pragmatic and open to modern mental health care. The only roadblock was the access. It is not surprising in an area where modern mental health care almost non-existent. Ordinary people who have less exposure to the modern world than their leaders are not expected to something different. Again to emphasize the purpose of the study, our objective was to find out what they think as causes
when someone develops mental disturbance and where they seek help and taking into consideration this existing knowledge when planning expansion of modern mental health service.

2. Without information about the effectiveness of interventions, I believe the authors should be more circumspect in making judgements about what may be "needed" (see Discussion). People may prefer traditional care but this does not mean that it works well - especially if there are few alternatives, or the alternatives are too inaccessible and costly. In other words, until there is evidence of efficacy of various interventions, judgements should be cautious about which domains of interventions are preferred or recommended for future development.

Answer: The purpose of a qualitative study is to report the existing reality as lived by the participants. We tried to capture the existing opinion by the community leaders: their attribution styles and their current mode of interventions. In the discussion we described the pragmatic nature of the view of the participants i.e. their willingness to try anything until they get something that works. Using this information, we argued for expansion of modern mental health which is currently supported by evidence. We also tried to emphasize, in our recommendation, the need to take into account the views of the community leaders when planning expansion of modern mental health care. We further recommended studying indigenous knowledge which we think is something acceptable and endorsed by the health policy of Ethiopia.

3. The authors mention an epidemiological study that was undertaken in the same region - a brief description of the study and its findings would be very useful.
Answer: Based on the comment above, a brief summary of the main findings in the epidemiological study is included in the background section of the manuscript.