Reviewer’s report

Title: A follow-up on patients with severe mental disorders in Sardinia after two changes in the regional policies: poor resources still correlate with poor outcomes

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Reviewer: Anita Holzinger

Reviewer’s report:

The paper represents an innovative contribution to mental healthcare research, studying the relationship between the provision of resources for the care of people with severe mental illness and outcome. It addresses an issue of growing importance in view of actual tendencies, as consequence of the current fiscal and economic crisis, to cut funds for healthcare in general and mental healthcare in particular.

Before the paper can be published it needs some reworking. Here a few suggestions:

- In the Introduction, after having described the development of mental health policy in Sardinia in recent years, the authors state that “it makes sense to evaluate the impact of these changes on the patients on whom all the services should focus”. However, is this really the research question addressed by the study? It seems rather questionable that the study design chosen would allow providing an answer to this question. The authors should try to find a better transition between the first part and the aim of the study as described in the last phrase of the Introduction.

- The authors take the association between the increase in staff available for patient care and better outcome on the HoNOS as indication of the importance of the provision of sufficient resources for successful treatment. Could this finding also be interpreted in a different way? And what about the CGI and GAF? Have the authors some ideas why no significant association was found with these two measures?

- Although some limitations of the study are acknowledged it seems appropriate to discuss them at some greater length.

In the manuscript there are numerous typing errors which should be corrected as follows:

Introduction:

1st page, 1st paragraph, 4th line: “care although the community services…”
1st page, 1st paragraph, 6th line: ”..in southern regions. Not surprisingly..”
1st page, 2nd paragraph, 2nd line: “…using standards of..”
1st page, 2nd paragraph, 3rd line: “Thus, the debate…”
1st page, 3rd paragraph, 1st line: “..implemented late (Rudas et al, 1988)”

2nd page, 2nd paragraph, 5th line: “..there was a change in the government of the region. The new administration..”

2nd page, 3rd paragraph, 8th line: “In consequence, a more traditional system of mental health care has been installed in 2009.”

Methods:

Instruments, 1st line: “..ANTAS which is a semi-structured interview that has previously been successfully used and validated in this population [7,8].”

Statistical analysis, last line: “…DSMs was examined by means of…”

Results:

Socio-demographic and clinical characteristics of patients, 1st line: “..recruited, 259 (83.8%) completed..”

Socio-demographic and clinical characteristics of patients, 3rd line: “..regarding gender, age(??) or..”

Socio-demographic and clinical characteristics of patients, 8th line: “..sample are reported in Table 1.”

Staff resources in the DSMs studied, 4th line: “..were below the standard suggested by the Italian Ministry of Health (1 staff person per 1,500 inhabitants) (Gazetta ufficiale 274, 1999).”

Outcome indicators during follow-up (without time!), 5th line: “Even though the severity of illness…”

Outcome indicators during follow-up, 7th line: “…significantly less in DSM6 (F (14.540), p=0.000 and F (18.674), p=0.000, respectively).”

Table 2: “Increase in total staff during follow-up (%)

Correlation between improvement in outcome (without s!) and increase of resources, 3rd line: “..correlated with an improvement in the total score of the HoNOS.”

Table 4, last line (Spearman correlation): “SRRC=0.975”

Discussion:

1st page, 2nd paragraph, 5th line: “..the resources are insufficient..”

1st page, 2nd paragraph, 8th line: “..the paucity of resources…”

1st page, 2nd paragraph, 10th line: “..by the HoNOS)..

1st page, 2nd paragraph, 17th line: “..years. About 80%…”

1st page, 2nd paragraph, 18th line: “…personality disorder. This group showed a mean HoNOS score of 11.36 (SD 6.21) with..”

1st page, 2nd paragraph, 19th line: “…end of the follow-up, which is similar..”

2nd page, 4th paragraph, 3rd line: “..in future studies. This conclusion is supported…”
3rd page, 1st paragraph, 1st line: “..important but are also the most expensive part…”
3rd page, 1st paragraph, 2nd line: “..thus need being convinced to invest…”

In addition, there are a number of formal points which should be addressed when revising the paper:
- Pagination is missing
- Reference Rudas et al: In the text (1st page of Introduction, 3rd paragraph, 2nd and 7th line) the year is 1988 whereas in the reference list it is 1989. Please clarify.
- Table 2: In the legend, please omit the phrase referring to the Italian standard. It should be included in the text.
- Table 2: Please check the percentages referring to the increase in staff, since they do not correspond to the difference between the figures given for total staff at the beginning and at the end of the study.
- The subtitle “Correlation between improvement in outcome measures and increase of resources” should be underlined rather than in bold characters.
- In Table 3 and 4 as well as in Figures 1 to 3 commas should be replaced by dots.
- Since the information provided in Table 3 and in Figures 1 -3 is redundant, one might consider dropping the figures since they do not contain additional information. If one decides to keep them the order of DSMs should be the same as in Table 3.
- The reference list must be revised according to the guidelines of the journal.

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 no competing interest