Reviewer’s report

Title: Psychological consequences and associated risk factors among adult survivors of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake

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Reviewer: Cassidy Gutner

Reviewer’s report:

The current paper examines predictors of functioning in individuals impacted by the Wenchuan, China earthquake in 2008. The authors had a large sample to examine the psychological effects on adult survivors one year following the earthquake. This manuscript has the potential to meaningfully contribute to the literature; however, there are several areas that would benefit from significant revisions before it is ready for publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Abstract:

The authors state that the goal of the paper is to look at predictors of functioning. Although it is important to discuss implications related to comorbidity, the study did not examine whether or not comorbidity predicted more problems or whether other factors predicted comorbidity. Even though the authors have different diagnoses, they did not report analyses examining comorbidity as it is understood in the literature. Looking at anxiety, depression, and PTSD separately does not mean the analyses can speak to comorbidity. As a result, having this in the abstract is misleading and should be removed.

Introduction:

1) In general, the introduction felt choppy and did not flow very well. The introduction, and paper in general, would benefit from editing to improve readability throughout. For example, on page 3, the paragraph starts with a sentence about earthquake exposure and psychological distress, then there is a sentence about measurement varying across studies, but measurement is never discussed in the paragraph. If the authors are not going to elaborate on it, it doesn’t make sense to have it in there and it breaks the flow, which contributes to fully understanding/following the logic.

2) On page 2 the authors discuss “short term” outcomes. Please define what time frame you are referring to as it is hard to interpret without any anchor.

3) On page 4 the authors write “Symptoms levels of PTSD were associated with the severity of the earthquake experience…” and there is no citation here. Where is this information from? If it is from another article, please cite it. If it is from this study, it is out of place and needs to be moved to the appropriate section of the paper.

4) On page 4 the authors write what the study is about but do not provide any
hypotheses. Providing hypotheses would better define the questions proposed by
the authors.

Method:

1) On page 5 the authors write that the sample was “mainly drawn from…”
Where were the other participants from? It is hard to generalize this data
presented in this paper without knowing exactly who comprised the sample.
Please clarify.

2) On page 5, please define what you mean by the “whole process of the
earthquake.” Does this involve feeling shock waves? Witnessing the aftermath?
Both? Neither of these? Clearly defining information like this in the paper would
greatly improve the quality.

3) The authors describe “work families,” but it is unclear what work families are.
Please define to aid in interpretation of study.

Measures:

Overall, this section is poorly organized. It jumps back and forth between
difference measures. It would read a lot better if you had one paragraph for each
measures. Furthermore, you need to at least discuss reliability/validity of all of
the measures you used.

1) On page 6 the authors use the word “pinpoint” and it is unclear what they
mean by this. Please clarify or remove this word.

2) Page 7 discussed the PCL, but there is no reference to this measure
anywhere in the paper or in the reference list despite being a primary outcome
measure. Please include.

Statistical Analyses:

1) This section starts out with “due to different proposes various statistical
methods were utilized in the literature.” This sentence is confusing. Do the
authors mean different purposes? Additionally, are you communicating that there
were different methods used in the paper that have also been used in the
literature? If so, the end of the sentence might read more clearly if it said
“…various statistical methods were utilized that are consistent with other
research (insert a citation).” Otherwise, you could remove the phrase “in the
literature.”

Results:

1) On page 8, please define what is meant by “relatively low educations levels.”
Does this mean no college?

2) Under basic analyses the first two sentences are very confusing. Please
provide anchors about what the range of scores mean. It is difficult to interpret
any of the analyses without anchors that give meaning to the numbers.

3) Please clarify analyses on page 9. Are these mean difference scores? If so,
please rephrase, if not, please clarify what is meant by “test of difference on
mean scores.”

4) Table 2 needs more context. It is unclear how coding was done in these
analyses, making it difficult to interpret the significant results presented. If these results are going to be included, there needs to be text to discuss what they actually mean.

5) Under geographical differences, please re-write the sentence that currently reads, “As to these psychological problems, would different geographical locations show different features.” The sentence is currently more conversational and changing it to more of a scientific format would improve readability.

Discussion:
1) Generally there are several sections of the discussion that are difficult to follow. For example, the last sentence on page 12 states “Women in China, in addition to work, women are committed to do housework and raise children.” This sentence is very confusing and needs to be reworded. The next sentence states “this kind of situation may explain the higher levels of psychological symptoms,” but the authors do not clarify how this may explain the situation. Please clarify and expand.

2) There are parts of the discussion that are repetitive, for example, low income is mentioned in several different places. Reorganization of information to fit with the same topics would improve readability.

3) On page 16 the authors discuss the fact that there are well-establish treatments for anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Given that this journal reaches a national audience, it would be helpful to cite gold standard treatments for these disorders if they are being broadly discussed.

4) The other major concern is around the incorporation of a discussion on comorbidity. The analyses presented here really do not address comorbidity in the traditional sense of several current diagnoses that are examined together in respect to functioning. Given how the data are presented in the current paper, comorbidity was not examined, simply three difference measures to assess three different sets of symptoms (anxiety, depression, and PTSD) were included. This should really be removed from the paper as the data in the current form do not speak to this issue.

Overall there are also several typos, such as on page 12 where “sever” is written instead of “severe,” and “The” instead of “the.” Fixing the typos and using more scientific language would greatly improve the quality of the manuscript and would allow for the findings to be highlighted more effectively. This paper has promise to contribute to the literature after significant clarifications are made to improve overall clarity of the paper.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) At the bottom of page 5, the sentence that starts with, “Group members explained the goals…” would fit better at the end of the previous paragraph where the authors discuss informed consent. It feels out of place here.

2) On page 5, the authors write “only very few.” This is redundant and readability would be improved by removing “only.” The end of the sentence reads “…and
met literacy problems.” I believe this should say “and had literacy problems.” There are a number of other places in the manuscript with these errors. Editing would greatly improve the quality of this paper.

3) You don’t necessarily have to report that you used 0.05 as a cut-off for significance as it is the commonly accepted level. However, if you decide to keep this in, it isn’t appropriate to say that it was “thought to be.” Instead you can just state that it was used as the cut-off score.

4) In Table 4, please indicate that these scores are means.

5) Discussion: The authors cite “three kinds of symptoms,” please write out what they are.

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

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare I have no competing interests