Reviewer's report

Title: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Patients with Traumatic Brain Injury

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Reviewer: Ehud Klein

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Review comments, by Ehud Klein MD & Danny Koren PhD.

The authors studied 46 TBI patients from a neurological rehab. Unit, to assess the relationship between extended loss of consciousness and the formation of PTSD. The results showed that 27% of subjects without extended loss of consciousness but only 3% of those who had extended loss of consciousness met criteria for PTSD at the time of the interview. The authors conclude that while TBI and PTSD are not mutually exclusive, PTSD is unlikely to develop in subjects with TBI who had extended loss of consciousness.

Overall this is an interesting paper that adds to the expanding body of knowledge about the relationship between memory to traumatic events and the development of PTSD. The study used a retrospective design that in general is less informative than a prospective design, but on the other hand used a unique cohort of patients. In general the paper is written clearly and the overall design and data analysis are adequate. A few comments are noteworthy and should be addressed by the authors:

1. The authors state that 46 inpatients consented to participate in the study. They do not, however, provide any further information regarding their sample selection procedure. At a minimum, the authors should check and report on the size and composition (i.e., conscious versus unconscious) of the initial subject pool and how many inpatients (from each type) were approached for participation in the study.

In addition, they should compare those who agreed to participate with those who declined to participate on key socio-demographic variables. Clearly, without this information it is impossible to rule out potential sample selection biases (e.g., “unconscious” inpatients agreeing less to participate), and to ascertain that the two groups are indeed representative of their correspondent populations (i.e., conscious versus unconscious survivors).

2. The key independent variable in the study was loss of consciousness during the trauma. No information, however, is provided with respect to this variable was measured or determined. Based on patients’ self recollection? reviews of medical chart? Glasgow Comma Scale? Etc. No doubt, this needs explication.

3. On the bottom of page 6, there is a reference to eight out of 32 unconscious patients. This figure is inconsistent with the number of unconscious patients in the rest of the paper. This requires correction or further explaining.