Reviewer's report

Title: Post-traumatic stress disorder following patient assaults among staff members of mental health hospitals: a prospective study

Version: 1 Date: 17 February 2006

Reviewer: Ian Needham

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper is a compact, concise presentation of research results on the course PTSD after aggressive encounters of staff in psychiatric settings. The question is novel and – to my knowledge – is the first to monitor the phenomenon employing a longitudinal design. The research thus fills a gap in knowledge on the subject. The authors employ appropriate methods with the use of standardised instruments. The paper certainly adds to the current body of knowledge on the subject of PTSD and violence in psychiatric settings.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
The authors conclude that “a considerable percentage of staff members develop PTSD after a patient assault”. This conclusion is difficult to support given the fact that no data on the population (staff having been subjected to patient aggression) or the estimated population are presented. I suggest either the presentation of such data or a more tentative conclusion.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
• In the conclusions reported in the abstract the authors should avoid the term “significant minority” which may be suggestive of statistical significance. Given the fact that no testing was done it would be more appropriate to write e.g. a “minor proportion”.
• For clarification purposes the authors should indicate what the term “organizational reactions” (methods, second paragraph) denotes.
• Some minor language flaws should be corrected prior to publication (Results, first paragraph: “hospitals” or the use of the definite article: Introduction: “The aim of the present study…” Methods: “The median time…”, Results, first paragraph, last sentence: The participants had been working…”

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
• The authors may opt to use a term such as “monitoring” or “a prospective longitudinal study” to indicate to the readers that the study is concerned with the course of PTSD and symptoms thereof.
• The authors may wish to report briefly on the findings of the one detected study using an acknowledged PTSD instrument (Richter and Berger, 2001) in the introduction and use the same to elaborate the discussion. This procedure may demonstrate what the current paper adds to the body of knowledge on the subject.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.