Reviewer’s report

Title: Stigma in response to mental disorders: a comparison of Australia and Japan

Version: 1 Date: 27 January 2006

Reviewer: Wulf Roessler

Reviewer’s report:

General

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
I agree with the authors that there are only few national or cross cultural studies on stigma associated with mental illness. There is a special interest to compare two cultures namely a Western and an Asian culture each in an industrialised country with respect to stigma associated with mental illness.

The editors asked me the question if this kind of publishing deserves further support as two papers in BMC Psychiatry from the same surveys in Australia and Japan have been published. For me the submitted manuscript seems worth publishing as the previous two publications touched other questions when comparing the Australian and Japanese public.

Nevertheless there are some major concerns, which I would like the authors to consider which I will explicate in more details further below.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
There is not much more to say than I already said in my previous reviews and what has been incorporated already in the submitted manuscript. As such one can say that the methods are appropriate, well described and the details are sufficient provided to replicate the work. The well-known shortcomings of the methodology are mentioned by the authors under limitations of the study.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
Yes

4. Does the manuscript adhere to relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
In one way one cannot object to the way the authors analysed their data especially as the same methodology was accepted in the previous publications. But I would like the authors to consider the following thoughts: There has been multiple testing, resulting in an almost endless description of different results concerning either the Australian or the Japanese public. The least what has to be done is to correct the data for multiple testing. It could well be that some of the data, which currently turns significant then will not be significant any more. But I rather would like to encourage the authors to conduct a regression analysis where the dependent variable would be stigma. One could either put all variables including the two different national surveys in one regression analysis or conduct two separate regression analysis one concerning the Japanese and the other concerning the Australian public. Again it could very well be, that quite a few of the currently significant variables will not be significant in a regression analysis. This would be helpful to reduce the great number of significant variables which each are not per se difficult to interpret but stimulate an endless discussion of the pros and cons of each significant variable and its meaning.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? Considering the current statistical analysis the discussion and conclusion are well balanced and adequately supported by the data. If the authors would decide to apply other statistical procedures probably the discussion could be shortened. In the discussion of the manuscript one might speculate about causes and consequences of each significant variable. It always can be this way around or the other way around. I shall give an example. If one provides less psychiatric beds in a country and makes mentally ill more visible in the community, it does possibly reduce stigma or is the number of beds a consequence of the stigma associated with mental illness in each country.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes.

7. Is the writing acceptable? Yes.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Yes

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests