Reviewer's report

Title: Mental health consultations in a prison population: a descriptive study

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Reviewer: Alexander I Simpson

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General
This paper addresses an important but little addressed area of service delivery to a vulnerable population. Naturalistic studies like this have merit on that basis, even though its basic design is simple. The methods are clear and simple, although the service context is not fully described. There are, though, certain inherent weaknesses that the authors need to emphasise a little more. First, such a study design contains no measure of absolute need, or prevalence of need, and instead uses therapist perspectives for whether or not need has been met. Whilst a reasonable approach, the limitation of not using a survey design and subject interviews needs more prominent emphasis. But, few others have attempted to address these questions and appropriate rigour has been applied, so I believe the paper merits publication.

My comments for amendment all fall into the "Minor essential" category

1. The authors must state clearly that they have no measure of prevalence of mental disorder, thus are only considering identified mental disorders for treatment, and how much of that need therapists judge is being met. This applies to all stages of the paper, where current reading underemphasises these points.
2. And related, it would help the reader if the authors explained what processes are employed to screen for the presence of mental disorders, and the composition and structure of the case identification processes and teams.
3. I am unclear why age can only be presented as categories in one part of the data, but at other stages as a continuous variable.
4. There are some minor typos eg 'form' instead of 'from' on page 8, and 'effectuate' on page 18. Further, it would be valuable to define what preventive detention is, as the authors variously refer to it as one being 'held in' and 'admitted to' this status, making it unclear if it is a legal or a clinical category of detention. Also some uses of English are a little unusual, such as 'deviant' in the first sentence.

Those comments made, the paper is a valuable contribution to the literature of service provision to mentally ill prisoners.

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What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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: No
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests