Reviewer's report

Title: The importance of the concepts of disaster, catastrophe, violence, trauma and barbarism in defining posttraumatic stress disorder in clinical practice

Version: 1 Date: 18 March 2008

Reviewer: John David Kinzie

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. This is a long paper which is well-researched and it has a novel approach to criterion A on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. As such, it attempts to present a topology of the stressor criteria; they also use the terms disaster, catastrophe, violence, trauma, and barbarism. There was a good review of the development of languages for these terms, some in Greek and Latin, which I personally was not aware of. On the other hand, it seems to me more erudite and perhaps pedantic than it needs to be to develop this topology. My first impression is that this presents a solution for which there is no clinical problem, i.e. I know no one who does not diagnoses PTSD when the patient says they have a stressor and they meet all the B, C and D criteria. Would anyone really not diagnose PTSD for someone with nightmares, startle reaction, intrusive thoughts, and avoidance behavior just because there was some question whether the stressor was sufficient to meet criteria A? I think not, and I think that the differences in ICD-10 and DSM-IV are not really relevant to the practical matters of clinical practice. Solution to criterion A, offered by the authors, seemed to me to have certain intellectual clarity and probably is useful. However, as I said, I’m not sure people consider criterion A in those specific of terms.

2. A few specific areas intrigue me. “Barbarism” is not a term commonly used, at least not in American literature. I’ve never actually seen it used before in relation to PTSD. The more common, and clearly significant, word is “terrorism,” which has a useful and widespread connotation with trauma.

3. A minor point: With regards to the authors statement that “the hypothesis that a terrible event might cause effects other than those merely physical was developed only after the Franco-Prussian War” (page 8), I don’t think this is correct. For example, I think that many people before that realized that the Railroad Spinal Syndrome, developed in England, actually was a psychological effect rather than a physical effect (Kinzie & Goetz, A Century of Controversy Surrounding Posttraumatic Stress Syndromes, Journal of Traumatic Stress, 1996).

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, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.