Reviewer's report

Title: Mental health of returnees from Germany following state-sponsored repatriation

Version: 1 Date: 10 August 2008

Reviewer: Robert David Schweitzer

Reviewer's report:

From: BioMed Central Editorial [editorial@biomedcentral.com]
Sent: 06 August 2008 07:34 AM
To: Robert Schweitzer
Subject: Review for BMC Psychiatry
Re: Ulrike von Lersner, Thomas Elbert and Frank Neuner
BMC Psychiatry
Mental health of returnees from Germany following state-sponsored repatriation

REPORT

Overall this is an important paper which highlights a new area in refugee research and has important policy implications. In spite of the small sample size, I wish to commend the authors on their research, as the paper is a longitudinal study, and incorporates an appropriate methodology to gain a better understanding of the impact of current policies on refugee health. The paper is well conceptualized, the title is accurate and with a minor amendment, the abstract provides a useful overview of the paper.

There are a number of issues which I believe need to be addressed prior to publication. These recommendations are being put forward in terms of improving an important paper in the field.

Results need to be discussed further in terms of the statistical significance of differences (eg., 44% and 88% on pg 2)

Overall, the literature review is well done and provides a comprehensive overview of the field. There are studies which have examined the mental health of similar groups of refugees in other western countries which are not reviewed and would be of interest, particularly in terms of providing a broader context of the mental health profile of the research participants, but this change is not essential.

Method section

Please indicate that the study, presumably, was assessed and provided with ethical approval from a recognized body.

There is some confusion as the participants are described as being from the
former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Turkey, but in the remained of the paper, they are treated as from the former Yugoslavia. Please clarify.

On pg 14, what is Gmelch?

Please report on the reliability and validity of the PDS, preferably with refugee populations.

Why was the Section I (PTSD) section of the M.I.N.I. not included?

Results Section

Pg 15 reference is made to participants returning with family members. This is an important variable and is not looked at again?

The authors refer to 13 participants returning (pg 16). Were these the same as the 12 participants previously reported or different participants? This section is a bit confusing.

The inclusion of qualitative data in interesting in this section but it would make the results section a little clearer to have one section focused upon the quantitative data and a separate section focused upon the qualitative data. (Also include a section in the method section to indicate the inclusion of qualitative data).

Under Mental Health (pg 18, line line 11, change “having” to “meeting the criteria for”)

Three lines further, change returnees consulted to “returnees reported having consulted”

It would be useful to compare the mental health data with other comparable studies on mental health of refugees, but this is not essential.

Discussion

Pg 20, the authors report on the rates of suicidal ideation and compare their findings with the general population. Please report the incidence in the general population.

Pg 21, change “increase in PTSD” to “increase in symptoms of PTSD”.

A number of important points are made in this section of the discussion. Certainly the implications for policy are significant and I do appreciate the points made about the speed of processing applications for asylum.

The limitations section is comprehensive, but it could also be added, depending on the authors experience whether there is a tendency to more strongly state mental problems in the follow up interviews and whether this was taken into account and the authors are satisfied that the interviews were consistent with their assessment of informants.

Overall, it is an ambitious and well conducted study with some important conclusions.

Recommendation

Accept after minor essential revisions (which the authors can be trusted to make)
Quality of written English
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Overall, the level of English is good, however, the entire manuscript needs to be revised so that all sentences beginning with a numeral are changed to express the numeral in words, eg 47 VARP at the beginning of a sentence is changed to Forty seven....

Statistical review
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I believe that the authors will be able to check the statistics. The essential issue is that the authors clarify if the changes between the levels of disturbance reported in Germany prior to repatriation are significantly different to the figures reported after repatriation.

Robert Schweitzer
10 August 2008

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests