Author's response to reviews

Title: The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Project in Brazil: Neuropsychological, Structural and Molecular Neuroimaging Studies in Victims of Urban Violence

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Version: 2 Date: 23 March 2009

Author's response to reviews: see over
São Paulo, the 23rd of March 2009

Dear Ms. Liz Hoffman
Assistant Editor
BMC-series journals

MS: 1693870893248808
The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Project in Brazil: Neuropsychological, Structural and Molecular Neuroimaging Studies in Victims of Urban Violence

Dear Ms. Hoffman,

Bellow the answers to the referee’s comments on the manuscript 1693870893248808, “The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Project in Brazil: Neuropsychological, Structural and Molecular Neuroimaging Studies in Victims of Urban Violence”:

Referee: The number of measurements in the neuroimaging and neuropsychological studies is extraordinarily high and I doubt that severely traumatized patients are able to complete the whole battery of tests. Moreover, the patients' ability to concentrate as well as their anxiety level may comprise a potential confound that is not controlled for.

Answer: The referee has a good point in terms of the extension of the exams. We have already examined several subjects and the protocol as it is seems to be feasible. However, as expected some subjects will not agree to do an MR scan due to claustrophobia, and the more functional subjects are less likely to come to the neuropsychological exams in an extra day of evaluation. We were already expecting this kind of problems and the sample size calculation is large enough for each study with a loss of up to 40%, so no individual study will have problems with that. The use of the data from multimodality analyses such as dopamine transporter density, prefrontal cortex volume and executive functions performances in PTSD subjects and controls, may be affected by a loss of subjects recruited and will be evaluated in each of the analyses.

Referee: While the combination of measures is unique and some of the variables, like the peri-traumatic responding, have not been tested before, it seems that the designs of the intended investigations go quantitatively but not qualitatively beyond previously presented research designs. Therefore, I believe, an active researcher would gain little from studying these protocols. I think that data should be added.
**Answer:** This study is not only unique in the combination of different methodological approaches (careful phenotype characterization (including early traumatic experiences), structural and molecular neuroimaging, psychoendocrine testing, neuropsychological testing, and genetics), but also due to the design. The subjects will be recruited from the community from the epidemiological study and the controls are going to be recruited from the same geographical area (matched for sex, age, schooling, and by violence and cultural environment). This approach is novel in biological studies of PTSD and we expect to give results that are superior from the data obtained from clinical populations or war studies. In addition, we will be examining vulnerability and resilience factors from people drawn from the same social and cultural environment.

We are happy to provide any further information required.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Jair de Jesus Mari  
Department of Psychiatry