Reviewer's report

Title: Do adverse childhood experiences increase the risk of postdeployment posttraumatic stress disorder in US Marines?

Version: 1 Date: 3 February 2010

Reviewer: Matthew Jakupcak

Reviewer's report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions
NONE

- Minor Essential Revisions
NONE-THIS PAPER WAS WELL PREPARED FOR SUBMISSION.

- Discretionary Revisions
THIS MANUSCRIPT DESCRIBES A PROSPECTIVE STUDY IN WHICH PRE-DEPLOYMENT FACTORS, AND SPECIFICALLY, ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EVENTS (ACE), ARE EXAMINED AS PREDICTORS OF POST COMBAT POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER IN A SAMPLE OF 8391 MARINES WHO WERE DEPLOYED TO IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN FROM 2001 TO 2004. THE MANUSCRIPT IS WELL WRITTEN, WELL PREPARED FOR SUBMISSION, AND APPROPRIATELY SUCCINCT. THE PROSPECTIVE NATURE OF THE STUDY DESIGN IS A SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH AND THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY CONTRIBUTE TO WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACE AND ADULT ONSET PTSD. BELOW I LIST SEVERAL MINOR SUGGESTIONS AND QUESTIONS, WHICH IF THE AUTHORS ARE TO CLARIFY, MAY HELP TO IMPROVE THE PAPER:

1. IT APPEARS AS THOUGH THE AUTHORS USED DATA COLLECTED AS PART OF A LARGER EFFORT TO EXAMINE PREDEPLOYMENT FACTORS PREDICTING POST DEPLOYMENT MENTAL DISORDERS (IN THE DISCUSSION, THE AUTHORS CITE A PREVIOSLY PUBLISHED STUDY OF ACE IN RELATION TO ALCOHOL MISUSE). IF SO, THIS MIGHT BE BETTER CLARIFIED EARLIER IN THE TEXT (i.e., DESCRIBE THE GOALS OF THE OVER-ARCHING STUDY).

2. THE INTRODUCTION MAY BENEFIT FROM SEVERAL ADDITIONAL SENTENCES ELABORATING ON THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT STUDY RELATIVE TO THE LARGER LITERATURE ON ACE AND ADULT ONSET PTSD. THE AUTHORS DO NOT IMMEDIATELY INTRODUCE THE TERM 'ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EVENT' (NOT UNTIL THEY DESCRIBE THE FINDINGS OF SACCO ET AL. PAPER) AND READERS MAY BENEFIT FROM A BRIEF SENTENCE TO OPERATIONALIZE THE TERM (i.e., DEFINING WHAT CONSTITUTES -AND DOES NOT CONSTITUTE- ACE). ALSO, IT MAY
HELP TO CLARIFY FOR THE READER THE THEORETICAL REASONS WHY ACE MIGHT PREDICT ADULT ONSET PROBLEMS (e.g., ASSOCAITED WITH CHILDHOOD EMOTION DYSREGULATION) AND TO STATE CLEARLY THE SPECIFIC HYPOTHESES OF THE CURRENT STUDY.

3. THE INVESTIGATORS USE MONTHS DEPLOYED AS A PROXY FOR COMBAT EXPOSURE.

IS IT LIKELY THAT MARINES DEPLOYED AT DIFFERENT TIMES AND DIFFERENT LOCATIONS EXPERIENCED DIFFERING DEGREES OF COMBAT EXPOSURE (THE AUTHORS NOTE IN THE DISCUSSION THAT COMBAT EXPOSURE IS HOMOGENOUS IN MARINES, BUT MIGHT THIS DIFFER ACCOURDING TO TIMELINE AND LOCATION OF DEPLOYMENT?).

4. THE AUTHORS EXPLAIN THAT THE ATFQT SCORE IS AN INTELLIGENCE TEST IN THE DISCUSSION-THIS MIGHT BE BETTER EXPLAINED FOR THE READER WHEN FIRST INTRODUCING THE TERM.

5. REGARDING THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FINDINGS: THE AUTHORS NOTE THAT MARINES WITH A HISTORY OF ACE MAY BE TARGETED FOR PTSD PREVENTION PROGRAMS, EARLY INTERVENTIONS, OR PROTECTION OF STRESSFUL EXPOSURES. IS THIS FEASIBLE? THAT IS, GIVEN THAT COMBAT EXPOSURE TENDS TO BE HOMOGENOUS AMONG MARINES, HOW FEASIBLE IS IT TO TRY AND LIMIT COMBAT EXPOSURE IN A SUBPOPULATION THAT MAY CONSISTITUTE APPROXIMATELY 11% OF MARINES DEPLOYED?

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.