Reviewer's report

Title: Internet-based Self-Assessment as Valuable Monitoring for Public Mental Health

Version: 1 Date: 16 February 2009

Reviewer: Hans van Oers

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Major Compulsory Revisions

This is an interesting study; it addresses a new and promising way to assess relevant information about individuals after a traumatic experience, especially after large-scale disasters. However, the article has some serious shortcomings that need to be improved to be improved.

The questions posed by the authors are to analyze the outreach and the usefulness of this self-screening-instrument, but it remains unclear what is more exactly meant by these two criteria. What was the initial target concerning the outreach? And how is ‘usefulness’ defined, and for what target group or target groups should it be useful? The question about the outreach is answered in some way in the discussion-session, but in the article there is not so much reflection on the question of usefulness. On the other hand, in the results-section also other results then results related to these two questions are presented.

In the method-section a short overview is presented of the development of the ONSET-instrument, to give the reader some idea about validity. The remark that ONSET and its proceedings were classified by the IRB as a completive mental healthcare service and therefore is exempted from review for authorization is confusing for me. This should be explained more clearly in the text.

Statistical analyses needs much more further explanation, the way it is described here does not give many clues for the reader. The paragraphs in the results-section about the subdivision in five groups could be transferred to the method-section. There is no explanation whatsoever in this section why an ANOVA and a regression-analysis are performed.

In the result-section, table 1 does not seem to sum up to one hundred percent. Perhaps there is something missing in the explanation of this table in the text? Table three and four are introduced without explaining the reasons why this ANOVA and regression-analysis are performed. This should be made clear in the method-section. Also figures one and two need more description and explanation in the text. No results are presented about the outreach of the instrument, or about the usefulness.

In the discussion-section the reader finds some data on the question on the outreach of the ONSET-instrument are presented. These data should be moved to the results-section. It is concluded here that the outreach of the instrument is
‘excellent’, but it is not clear for the reader why this conclusion can be made. Are any comparable studies available? And the excellent outreach is only valid for Switzerland, I presume. It would be interesting to see what specific actions have been undertaken in Switzerland to reach the response that is reported here, and to compare this response to countries where no such actions were undertaken.

**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’