Reviewer's report

Title: Health problems among detainees in Switzerland: a study using the ICPC-2 classification

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Reviewer: Matthew Hiller

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Review of Manuscript # 16815136044489 : Health Problems among Detainees in Switzerland: A Study using the ICPC-2 Classification.

The manuscript presents some interesting data, but additional work is needed to bring it up to publishable quality. The following comments are provided to help the authors couch the data within a context that will make it more useful to the scientific community. A number of methodological problems also are noted.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. The literature review is very terse, presents a cursory review of a significant area of research, and fails to make an effective argument for the current paper. Simply describing the prevalence of ICPC-2 diagnoses within a clinical population is insufficient. Focusing on whether certain diagnoses are more prevalent among prisoners relative to the general population in Switzerland is a much more interesting study. Comparisons within gender relative to the general population are even more interesting. A significant amount of literature from the United States has been omitted that would help make the case for understanding whether certain health problems are overrepresented among prisoners in Switzerland. A number of references are available via www.ncjrs.org, including government reports on health problems, infectious diseases, mental health, and substance abuse from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (search for authors Maruschak and Ditton), monographs on the health of American prisoners (search for Hammett), as well as abstracts and reprints of scientific articles dealing with health problems among American prisoners (search for Webster, Leukefeld, Mateyoke, Staton, Hiller, Abrams, Teplin, Krebs, and Belenko). Searches in databases such as MedLine and CJAbstracts also will yield numerous references.

2. Related to comment #1 above, the analyses and results sections as well as the data presented in the Tables and Figures included in the document should include columns that presents recent epidemiological data (separately for males and females along with a total column) from the general population of Switzerland to enable the reader to directly compare prisoners to the general public. Present and interpret findings relative to these reference categories.

3. The decision to exclude the 685 cases that did not have a medical diagnosis is problematic. Include these individuals and recalculate percentages to provide an
accurate measure of the prevalence of different diagnoses among the full sample of prisoners. This recalculation will enable comparison to the general population of Switzerland and provide the ability to determine which diagnoses are overrepresented among prisoners.

4. Explain why such a large proportion of prisoners are of foreign origin [see page 4; “the majority of Swiss prisoners were…of foreign origin (69.7%), and page 7, …92.5% of detainees with at least one medical consultation ever of foreign origin]. Also explain why a much larger proportion of the prisoners in the facility examined are of foreign origin relative to the general prison population. What proportion of the general Swiss population is of foreign origin? Are individuals of foreign origin overrepresented in Swiss prisons? How does this affect interpretations of findings?

5. Include a table comparing the demographics of the sample with the demographic characteristics of the entire Swiss prison population. This will show to what extent the sample is representative of the full prison population. Significant differences between these (for example in the percentage of foreign origin, see comment #4) have implications for the findings that should be discussed in the conclusion/limitations section of the paper.

6. The authors confuse health services with health problems in a number of places (cf., page 5, first part of paragraph 2). Based on the ICPC-2 code sheet included in the appendix, symptoms/complaints and diagnoses were coded, and health problems should be used throughout the manuscript. (NOTE TO EDITOR: As suggested by the authors, the code sheet should be included as an appendix to the paper).

7. Describe in greater detail the general health care assessment provided by nurses within 8 hours of entry to the facility. Why were only the first 3 questions from the AUDIT used to assess alcohol problems? Discuss limitations associated with using only the first 3 questions rather than the full instrument. Provide greater detail on how variables like heroin and cocaine use were operationalized (i.e., any use in the previous 30 days or daily use in the previous 30 days).

8. Explain why length of stay is an important variable for analytic consideration. Wouldn’t those with more serious health problems be expected to remain in the facility for longer periods of time?

9. On page 6, the authors note “description of specific psychiatric health problems will be presented in a separate article.” However, psychiatric and substance abuse problems are reported in this article. Only 7.9% of the prisoners were noted to have personality disorders. Is this an artifact of the diagnostic procedures or of the manner in which prisoners were referred into additional psychiatric examinations? It seems likely that this number significantly underestimates the prevalence of personality disorders, especially considering that several estimates based on American prisoners show that as many as 50% have antisocial personality disorder.
Minor essential revisions:

1. Table 4 is referenced in paragraph 2 (page 5) before Tables 1-3 are referenced.
2. Careful copyediting is needed to correct a large number of grammatical mistakes.
3. Figure 1 is very difficult to read. Reduce the number of categories (e.g., drop the low frequency diagnoses) and make the labels run horizontal rather than diagonal (and vertical). Alternatively, the data could be displayed as a table.
4. Describe the prison medical facility in more detail.
5. Differentiate between symptoms and diagnoses more effectively. Do not lump self-injury/self-harm with drug use and abuse.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.