Reviewer's report

Title: Exposures to war-related traumatic events and post-traumatic stress disorder among displaced Darfuri female university students: An exploratory study

Version: 1 Date: 29 April 2012

Reviewer: Egbert Sondorp

Reviewer's report:

Overall a well written, well structured manuscript with a lot of detail on used methodology. However, there are concerns which I think ought to be addressed in a revised next version.

1. The ethical dimension. Although the study received ethical clearance from the Ahfad University for Women (AUW) in the Sudan, I still have some ethical concerns related to the study.

- While individual confidentiality may be achieved, the group of participants can be easily identified and could be easily stigmatised by publication of this report. Virtually all students within AUW from Darfur were included in the study and hence the findings, e.g. high rates of PTSD and all the underlying determinants, apply to that particular group. What does it mean that this group (‘all students from Darfur) can then easily be seen as 'almost all traumatised' in the eyes of, for instance, fellow students or staff?

- This also links to the rationale of doing the study: addressing an empirical gap of a historically understudied group of citizens, in combination with the rather enigmatic statement on the 'momentum that the present Darfuri crisis is taking'. The findings can only apply to this very specific group of study participants and will not be in anyway generalisable. So, it would feel better if the study would have been part of a concern for this group of women and geared towards some form of evidence based assistance, 'action research'.

- Since all authors give the Maastricht University as their affiliation, one would expect ethical clearance from that institute as well, next to that of AUW.

- Why are addresses being noted?

2. Information about the study population. The background section claims that the study participants 'reflect the ongoing Darfuri war, and represents those having fled IDP camps and are now trying to cope and adjust as students in another part of the Sudan'. But what is it that brought these women to come and study in Omdurman? They come from Darfur, where they have been subjected to lots of horror and loss a huge numbers of family members. What happened that they then left Darfur to study in Omdurman. Who takes care of them? What about their social security at this stage in life? This seems a major determinant influencing both the study findings as well as possible interventions.
3. There is very little discussion on what it means to find a high rate of PTSD among these women, apart from an elaboration that the group therefore urgently needs 'psychological assistance', or, further on in the manuscript, 'urgent psychosocial intervention'. The usual issues like applicability of PTSD and its measurement instrument in this kind of settings should at least be raised (without being able to give a definite answer, as seen in other literature). The same applies as to the 'logic' of (still) suffering from PTSD symptoms in view of the range of atrocities these women have experienced. And, again, since we don't know the current situation, one can also not tell if forms of appropriate psycho-social support may not already be in place.

A few minor comments:

1. page seven: mind the typo in 'finding dead bodies and buying them'
2. there seems to be a discrepancy between the mentioned overall '49 war-related traumatic events' and the listings under the 4 dimensions, which only add up to 40 items.

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

**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