Reviewer’s report

Title: New place of living, eroding resilience and psychological distress among Somali Refugees: A qualitative and quantitative study

Version: 2 Date: 20 February 2012

Reviewer: Jane Herlihy

Reviewer’s report:

This is an interesting study, with findings that have important implications for policy as well as for our further understanding of the challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees.

The authors review frameworks for understanding the interactions between factors affecting people’s mental health under conditions of forced migration, asylum seeking and integration in new countries. They then describe a two-part study. They ran focus groups of Somali professionals and lay people (separate groups) in the US and UK. From these focus groups, as part of their collection of qualitative data they also explored perceptions and constructs of mental health amongst the Somali community and elicited suggestions of recruitment sites for the second phase for the study. The second phase was a ‘survey’ (n=189) of demographic/social indicators and a psychiatric diagnostic tool in 189 Somali refugees and asylum seekers in the US and UK.

The report of this two part study needs some work to clearly describe to the reader what was done, and found.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. The introduction needs a section defining the refugee & briefly explaining the process of seeking asylum for a non specialist audience. The penultimate paragraph in the introduction might be moved to the beginning to give this context before going into more detail about mental health implications.

2. The tables need sorting out – they are incorrectly numbered and referenced & in varying formats. Consider omitting the Demographic differences table.

3. There is no ‘limitations’ section.

4. ‘Resilience’ is referred to in the research question, and in subheadings of the results, but nowhere in the findings. Is it being assumed? I would agree, but think that it should be dealt with explicitly, if at all. No specific questions are asked about resilience and it does not appear to emerge from the focus group data. If it does, then it should be possible to make the case for it more clearly.

Minor essential revisions

Title
1. doesn't quite work grammatically:

Abstract
p.1 Background
2. l.4 the contrasts in - ?
3. l.5-6 to investigate the environments... as problematic – please reword

p.1 Methods
4. at this point the reader doesn’t know what a ‘topic guide’ is.
5. the final line suggests that you are reporting a completely different study. This is the second part of the current study - as introduced at the beginning of the paragraph. So this sentence needs rewording in order to avoid confusion.

p.2 Results
6. why not name the instrument?
7. suggested that thwarted aspirations....

p.2 conclusions
8. safe environment for the successful adaptation

p.5

p.7
10. lack of UN
12. reference the Geneva Convention properly
13. that recognises asylum...
14. months # months, sometimes years,
15. ....especially mental health – add reference
16. delete range of

p.8
17. the first sentence either needs expanding (thought by whom? When?) and properly referencing – or should be removed. If you keep in the statements about the difficulties of large surveys, then you must deal with those that have been done, e.g. Turner, Bowie et al’s 2003 study of Kosovan Albanians.
18. focus groups are one type of qualitative approach and are also used to – remove words in italics
19. this method can provide a rich insight
20. the final words of the last sentence on this page don’t make sense to me.

p.9
21. Programme(See Bhui... – end & start sentence.
22. the referencing style has changed
23. was received from each research participants
24. I suspect that the authors were asked to put in more about ethical considerations, but for my reading, the procedural description from “potential participants were reassured...” to the end of the section could be put after “university of Kent”, and the paragraph “according to Kessel... examination questions” deleted. The last sentence of the section would then be Informed written consent was received from all research participants”. The editor’s decision is, of course, the final one.

p.10
25. 48 attended
26. Delete sentence “Informed consent.... groups.”
27. No Table 2. If this is the same as the ‘topic guide’ of the abstract then use the same terminology in both places.

p.13
28. describe what reliability checks were done on the qualitative analysis (p. 13)
29. quotes # quotations
30. remove the last sentence in the first paragraph to the introductory paragraph to the Results section. In the results section you highlight at least two sub-themes where lay/professional responses were different, so you should also reword this sentence so that there is no contradiction
31. a number of research tools - ? you only mention 2
32. questionnaire which has been used
33. the questionnaire hopefully does not produce disorders! Yields diagnoses? Which ones? You need to describe this better for readers who don’t know the instrument. Does it have a trauma checklist (you suggest so later, at p.25)?
34. a demographic questionnaire
35. taps on # measures
36. and separation from family

p.14
37. the first paragraph suggests that you may have changed the standardised questionnaire. If so, more detail needed.
38. ‘perceived’ – either remove quotation marks & reference, or remove.
39. para. beg. “Moreover...” suggest you move this to the beginning of the section (as the subtitle suggests). It would make it easier to follow what you did.
40. test the feasibility

p.15

41. title: Focus Group results

42. this section needs an introductory paragraph introducing the main themes/patterns identified

43. as a refugee and as a black person

p.17

44. several other academic studies – reference(s)

45. professional participants ... more focus – than whom? If more than lay, you said they were the same as justification for reporting all together. Needs explanation.

46. Subtitle: resilience - I don’t see any examples of resilience in the text

p.18

47. vulnerable to breakdown under stress, partly – add comma, and consider whether you don’t mean “to break down”

48. “to cope” remove quotation marks or clarify what they add

pp. 21/2

49. Lay participants were more likely... + 3 quotations. Why is this not in the ‘material conditions’ theme?

50. discussed in great deal. Also - not sure what this sentence adds.

p.24

51. further logistic regression?

p.25

52. majority.. 70% -- on p. 24 you say ‘three-quarters’

53. similar traumatic events – how do you know? See comment above on describing the measure

p.26

54. increasingly connected with terrorism... – this isn’t in the results

55. add comma after for example, the acculturation model [14]

56. existence as ‘refugee’ – suggest in the singular

57. differences between the London and Minneapolis samples

p.27

58. previous national studies – reference(s)

p.28
59. comprising of
60. there original conflict
61. whilst the negative domestic ....caution. I don’t understand what this sentence means at this point.
62. However, employment may be dependent on ... legal status and ... language – perhaps mention that these dependencies (particularly the first) are also due to state legislation
63. Moreover... khat... This completely new topic needs a new paragraph, and perhaps a sentence explaining why you are addressing it all, e.g. Given the current debate on the use of Khat (ref(s)) it is of note that none of our participants...” (assuming they didn’t?). You should also mention, however, if there would be any stigma attached to discussing it in focus groups – and also why you didn’t ask about it in (assuming you didn’t) in your survey) rather than assuming that no mention means no issue. You might consider deleting this paragraph, if it is not lead by your results, unless you feel that it is important to engage with the debate.

p.29
64. planned settlement programmes – you need to explain this a little, mentioning UNHCR, for non-specialist readers
65. in the UK arrived as asylum seekers – as opposed to what?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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