Reviewer's report

Title: Psychological distress among Bam earthquake survivors in Iran: a population-based study

Version: 4 Date: 19 November 2004

Reviewer: Maria Livanou

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Method Section

a.. Page 4, first line: "were moved to the city of Bam after the earthquake". Why were they moved?
b.. Page 4, first line: "At this time," replace with "At the time of the screening."
c.. Page 4, second line: "80% of people stayed nearby their homes and the remaining 20% were moved.". What does nearby mean? Inside their homes? Did they live in tents nearby their homes? The latter possibility seems unlikely, because that would mean that 100% of the population was unable to live inside their pre-earthquake homes. This needs clarification.
d.. Page 4, line 3-5: It appears that in order to select a representative sample from Bam the authors have randomly selected households from some sort of list. The authors need to state:
   (a) Where did they obtain this listing of households (municipality?)
   (b) How many registered households appeared on the list
   (c) What percentage of the registered households they targeted for assessment? In the results it is stated 600 households and 400 ‘camps’ were targeted (I will presume here that ‘camps’ means ‘tents’, see comment below). So, in total 1000 households were targeted out of the how many that appeared on the list?
   (d) How many of the targeted households they were actually able to screen
   (e) How many of the targeted households were collapsed or uninhabited and thus they were unable to screen
   (f) How did they deal with the problem of collapsed or uninhabited households? Did they replace them with other households?

This is important information when it comes to describing sampling, especially when the sample is described as a probability sample. To improve this section the authors could consult the method sections of recent
published epidemiological studies in post-earthquake settings (Basoglu et al., 2004; Kilic & Ulusoy, 2003).

• Page 4, line 8: “For the study purpose” replace with “For the purposes of the study”

• Page 4, line 13: The section starting from "A team of trained interviewers" should constitute a new paragraph.

• Page 4, line 16-17: “Since there was no a validated measure of PTSD in Iranian language to use in this study, thus only psychological distress.” replace with “Since there was no validated measure of PTSD in the Iranian language, only psychological distress.”.

• Page 4, line 19: "The scale asks" replace with "The scale examines".

• Page 4, line 21: "GHQ-12 is a brief" replace with "GHQ-12 is brief".

• Page 5, line 2: Consider replacing the third sentence of the page with "In addition, we collected information about demographics and the number of family members that died due to the earthquake”.

Results

"Data was collected from 600 randomly selected households and 400 camps". 'Camps' usually means groups of tents or temporary shelters. Do the authors mean tents rather than camps? If they actually mean camps then they need to state the number of households in these 400 camps and the number of targeted for screening households.

Second paragraph:

• Replace "To find out differences" with "To examine differences"

• Replace ".the Student's test and the one-way analysis of variance" with ".Student's test and one-way analyses of variance"

Discussion

• The second part of the first sentence of the discussion ("and indicated that most vulnerable people showed greater degree of psychological distress") is vague and should be omitted.

• Second sentence of the discussion: Replace "The severe psychological morbidity" with "Psychological morbidity".
Ä· Page 6, 5th line, replace "relates" with "relate".

Ä· Page 7, 3rd line, replace "relates" with "relate"

Ä· Page 8, second paragraph. The sentence "This has consistently after earthquakes" is redundant. Move references 15,16 after previous sentence.

Ä· Page 9: The first paragraph ("Since the Bam earthquake." to ".and witnessing grotesque sites") does not seem to contribute anything to the discussion. The lack of information on important predictor variables is acknowledged by the authors later in the text, so this paragraph could be omitted.

Ä· Page 9, second paragraph: I would suggest that the authors start with the sentence "The present study had certain serious methodological limitations. Firstly,.". After describing the limitations, and before making recommendations for future research, the authors need to explain in which way (in spite of the methodological limitations) the results are useful. Are there any other published (in Iran or elsewhere) studies on the psychological consequences of the Bam earthquake? If not, I expect that the authors will state that their study is the only study addressing the psychological consequences of one of the most disastrous earthquakes of the last 50 years. In addition, to my knowledge the international literature does not contain any study on the psychological status of Iranian earthquake survivors, despite the fact that Iran is an earthquake-prone country.

Ä· Page 9: I suggest replacing the sentence "Thus, since depression is. etc" with "Thus, since depression is also common in earthquake survivors, our study is limited in not including a validated diagnostic measure of depression".

Ä· Page 9: The sentence "Secondly, the study was not measured.". Correct with "Secondly, no information was obtained on important trauma-exposure variables, such as."

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:

None