Reviewer's report

Title: Psychosocial factors and distress: A comparison between ethnic Norwegians and ethnic Pakistanis in Oslo, Norway

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Reviewer: Julie Cwikel

Reviewer's report:

General
1) The question posed by the authors is an interesting one, albeit I personally am not familiar with the history of the immigration of Pakistanis to Norway in general and Oslo in particular. However, the enormous demographic differences between the two groups suggests that they are not only demographically different, but that these demographic differences will seriously affect the level of social support both as perceived and used by the respondents. These issues are not adequately dealt with in either the data analyses or in the discussion of the findings.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
2) The populations described in the paper (Table 1) are completely different and have only the common residence in Oslo as a connecting variable. In each demographic variable, as stated in the article, there are statistically significant and conceptually significant differences. For example, there are only 2% of Pakistanis (Ps) compared with the 19% of Norwegians (Ns) in the age cohort of 75/76 years. Is this because older Pakistanis didn't immigrate, they have shorter life expectancy, they didn't answer the questionnaire or all of the above. More P males answered the questionnaire than N males, why? Twice as many N's have higher education than Ps. What does this mean about their place in the society? Over 90% of Ps are married compared to less than 1/2 the Ns.
3) While all of the above differences will influence lifestyle which will then influence social support, distress, sense of powerlessness, and social participation, let us just take marriage for starters. Most men and women report that most aspects of their social support they acquire through the intimate context of a marital relationship (and men even more than women). When this variable is included in the last analysis (Table 4), then ethnicity has NO impact on distress. I suggest that it must be controlled for in all analyses (Tables 2 & 3).
4) Furthermore, in the discussion, the authors would do well to relate to the literature on the impact of skin color on health as mediated through social processes. For example, Williams DR. Ann N Y Acad Sci. 1999:896:173-88. Race, socioeconomic status, and health. The added effects of racism and discrimination. However, others including N. Krieger and researchers in the CARDIA study have written on it extensively.
5) Perhaps a different data analysis strategy is called for here - given the enormous size of the N sample, perhaps it would be wiser to match the N sample to the P sample on age, sex, marital status (if possible) and education and then reconduct the analyses. For this reason, and those mentioned above, I suggest statistical consultation.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
6) I am not adequately familiar with the history of the immigration of Pakistanis to Norway - when did it start, how many live in Norway, was it an illegal or legal immigration, with families or by men alone? This needs to be explained in the introduction to the topic in order to contextualize the paper.
7) The sampling is not adequately explained and we can not access the paper where it is since one
of them is still in press. Was it a random sample or the total population who met the cohort criteria were sampled. More details are required.

8) The authors state that except for the powerlessness scale, a word to word translation into Urdu was made. Why was that? I have serious doubts whether idiomatic phrases such "making waves never gets you anywhere" and "you can't fight city hall" have real meaning in Urdu. Therefore, in analyzing the Cronbach's alpha in SPSS there is an option to evaluate the alpha if an item is removed. I suggest you look at this and decide whether to use these two items.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

9) I think that in order to be more critical about the meaning of their findings, the authors should consider how much populations who are working at low level and low pay jobs (and often working two and more jobs or working illegally) can have the leisure time to participate in clubs, political organizations, societies and groups.

10) Since usually .6 is considered the mimimum for alphas, I would suggest that .66 is not really "a strong internal consistency" but acceptable.

11) Since there is such a high level of missing data on income (due perhaps to the Ps feeling that there may be hidden meaning of the data collection, such as informing the tax or immigration authorities?), it is best not to even bother reporting it in a table.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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: Yes

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.