Reviewer's report

Title: What makes people decide who to turn to when faced with a mental health problem? Results from a French survey

Version: Date: 18 February 2007

Reviewer: Henry J Jackson

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)

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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)

Review of French study (Feb 2007).

This is an interesting study - an important study which adds to our knowledge base in this domain. The study aims "to explore the determinants towards mental health problems and which factors influence treatment opinions and the reliance on and compliance with health professionals’ advice." The questions posed and answered by this study are important ones concerning accessing care for mental health problems. The title and abstract are appropriate and the content and title represent the thrust and content of the study. The sample is large. The statistical techniques are appropriate and the procedures are well described. The tables are informative and clearly set out for the reader. The Discussion is excellent. The paper is well-written and well-organised.

Issues:

1. The results may be specific to French or Parisian experience and reflect different ratios of health professionals, different funding arrangements, etc. The authors could make this more explicit in the Discussion section.

2. There is an assumption that mental health literacy in the form of information is sufficient to improve knowledge but does it lead to attitudinal change and is attitudinal change sufficient to overcome stigma and lead to increased care seeking? Is this necessarily true? Could the authors comment?

3. Page 5 contains an excellent statement on patient-related factors, e.g., social phobia, and their influence on different pathways taken towards mental health care. What about the role of system-related factors in influencing pathways to mental health care, e.g., access to GP care, availability of mental health clinics, etc? Could the authors comment on this and perhaps include this in their paper?

4. The response rate was 60.4%. How does this compare to previous similar studies? Is the response rate better or worse than other similar studies?

5. We are told that 5.7% were excluded from the study “as they were detected as having one of the measured psychiatric diagnoses or had reported at least one contact with a provider for any mental health problem in the twelve previous months.” How confident can we be that the researchers detected other psychiatric disorders not covered by the CIDI-SF, e.g., bipolar disorders, psychosis and what about organic disorders?

6. How adequate is the Oslo 3-tem scale for measuring support? Could the authors please comment?

7. One issue (see pages 9 and 10) that is of importance concerns the chi-square results hiding co-linearity because of the nature of those tests. I mean this in the sense that if you prefer to seek help from a psychiatrist you are more likely to endorse psychotropic medications and if you prefer psychologists you are more likely to prefer psychotherapy. My point is that an answer to one question about preferences is likely to subsume an answer to another question about preferences - the results are not independent. This is raised in the Discussion but not specifically with regards to the chi-square results. I think the authors should
acknowledge this point.

Minor:
1. Page 4. The statement on page 4 paragraph 2, “On the other hand, a huge amount of information has been disseminated among the public from non-scientific sources.” requires a reference or two.

2. The heading on page 10 should read: “Multiple regression analyses”.

3. Data and references should be cited to buttress the point on page 12 of the Discussion: “However, this may be related to a higher density of psychiatrists in France.”

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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