Reviewer's report

Title: Mental health of immigrants from the former Soviet Bloc: a future problem for primary health care in the enlarged European Union? A cross-sectional study.

Version: 1 Date: 15 May 2006

Reviewer: Mauro Giovanni Carta

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper deals with an extremely interesting issue: mental health in immigrants from the former east block in an European Union country. However, the study presents several methodological weaknesses that require considerable attention in the discussion and limit the relevance of results. The main methodological problem concerns the use of a self-administered questionnaire as a diagnostic tool for psychiatric disorders or psychosomatic complains without any preliminary study of accuracy against a Gold Standard (e.g. a semi-structured interview as SCAN carried out by a clinician). The main self-administered screening instruments in Psychiatry (as GHQ or SRQ) show different cut-off in different cultures thus it is very difficult to compare prevalence rates without having determined the specific cut-off in each group.

Another issue is represented by the lack of homogeneity between groups (only in part highlighted in the discussion): for example the €œother€œ eastern European group presented a higher frequency of people migrated more than 20 years later, in contrast, in the Poland group seems to be under represented the people migrated in the last 10 years. This variable is hard to intend as a numerical one (more time more risk or vice versa) because the motivation for migration has changed in the time (for example: economical problems in respect to the condition of refugee) and has changed in different times in the different countries (in the 80€™ it was more easily to migrate from Poland than Russia or Cecenia). Due to the different condition of migration concerning variables as: motivation to migrations (e.g. settler, refugees, gastarbeiters); distance for the host culture; ability to develop mediating structures; legal residential status it is impossible to consider "migrants" as a homogeneous group concerning the risk for mental illness (see Migration and mental health in Europe (the state of the mental health in Europe working group: appendix 1) Mauro Giovanni Carta, Mariola Bernal, Maria Carolina Hardoy and Josep Maria Haro-Abad for the "Report on the Mental Health in Europe" working group, Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health 2005, 1:13). In these three samples those factors were very different between groups and probably within groups and the interaction between factors is not easy to report in a statistical model.

Due to the difficulty of carrying out studies on migration and the relevance of the issue the article deserves to be publish but the limits should be better underlined in the discussion.

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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)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)