Reviewer's report

**Title:** Mental health literacy as a function of remoteness of residence: an Australian national study

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 7 October 2008

**Reviewer:** Bo Runeson

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The topic of the manuscript is of interest to a journal of public health, namely to investigate if there are differences in attitudes and knowledge on mental disorder between urban and rural residents. This may be of interest for initiating and directing interventions to increase public awareness of mental ill-health and of the availability of psychiatric care.

The research group has an impressive record of publications within this area and has constructed a vignette method that has been successful in e.g. showing important differences in attitudes among professionals and lay people.

**Major Compulsory Revisions**

A major concern is the low participation rate, 34 %, of the total sample. However, an even more problematic point of view is that differences in participation rate between the three categories of remoteness is not investigated and declared. If participation varied in the three categories this could relate to the differences in attitudes. By the way, why did the methods include more telephone reminders to metropolitan participants than to participants in rural areas if participation rate in different areas was not a relevant issue? In the Discussion paragraph the author acknowledges the limitation of the low response rate, but I consider a thorough analysis of non-participation as essential in a scientific publication.

Another major concern is the presentation of results. Nine tables is, according to my experience from other journals, far too many. Also the comments in the Results section include differences that were not statistically different when controlling for demographic variables. I strongly suggest leaving these out, the Results section would benefit from being much shorter.

**Minor Essential Revisions**

The literature review is skewed towards Australian experiences. It would increase the interest of readers of the journal if a wider perspective was described in the background section. A consequence of the narrow perspective applied is the notion made by the author that suicide rates generally should be higher in rural areas. This may only partly be true, with a wider perspective, it could be contradicted that female suicide in many parts of the world has higher rates in urban areas. A part of the background that could have been of interest to include is if there are actual differences in prevalence of mental ill-health depending on remoteness. Hypothetically, being exposed to mental disorder during childhood
and adulthood could be a significant reason for different attitudes. This is partly studied in the present study by asking the respondents about current own mental health.

Educational background is one of the well-known reasons for differences in knowledge, attitudes and inclination to seek psychiatric help. This is not neglected in the present study, results are controlled for educational background. However, could it be that the two categories of educational background (having a bachelors degree or not) are too broad as a description of education?

Discretionary Revisions
A question that is not commented is why the participants were given a male or female version of the vignette. What was the argument for this, was any gender difference suspected? I do not understand if male respondents were given a male vignette or if the vignettes were distributed randomly?

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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.