Reviewer’s report

Title: Roles and effectiveness of lay community health workers in the prevention of mental, neurological and substance use disorders in low and middle income countries: A Systematic Review

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Reviewer: Saeed Farooq

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This is important review and addresses an interesting question. Two important points need to be addressed.

The literature search is till August 2011, which needs to be updated.

The major problem I have is that authors aim to review the studies on primary and secondary prevention programmes. They define this as studies in which community members of all age groups with no previously diagnosed MNS disorders (primary prevention) and those with early stage (my emphasis) of the illness (secondary prevention) were included.

While former is easy to understand, I am not clear how the second was defined i.e. how early stage of the illness was defined? Did they rely on the definition of early stages of illness provided by the included study? As far as I understand, most studies in this area do not define stage of the illness. For example, two included studies (reference no. 24 & 25) only report significant reduction found between the mean anxiety and depression scores of the two groups under study. None of these studies define the stage of illness and that would be true for most other studies. I would suggest that authors analyse and report these two types of studies separately. The studies which focus on no previous diagnosis can be reported as primary prevention studies. While other studies are reported as treatment studies, which is perfectly valid outcome. This will also need slight changes in introduction and perhaps the title.

There are important studies missing in the analysis such as Rahman et al (2008). Please make clear why this and similar other studies are excluded.

Reference