Reviewer's report

Title: Perceived challenges and opportunities arising from integration of mental health into primary care: a cross-sectional survey of primary health care workers in south-west Ethiopia

Version: 1 Date: 26 August 2013

Reviewer: Greg Armstrong

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. The paper reports on a small mental health-related knowledge, attitudes and practices survey of primary health care workers in a predominantly rural region of south-west Ethiopia. Whilst the scale of the survey is small, the results are interesting and yield important systemic implications for the WHO agenda of integrating mental health into primary health care. Additionally, the results add to a small but growing body of literature trying to better understand mental health from the perspective of primary health care workers in order to improve practice and create better outcomes for people with mental disorders.

Discretionary revisions

* Top of page 13. Perhaps replace the colon with a semi-colon; the colon implies a list is about to be presented.

* In the results section you frequently present both the numerator and the denominator in the text in brackets next to a percentage. You could just put the numerator in the brackets.

* Page 13, second paragraph. Rather than mentioning the number with the percentage in the text, you should do this the other way around as you have done in the paragraph above. The word “the” is also missing in the second sentence. (“…difference depending on THE level of training…”)_

Minor essential revisions

* PHC is an important setting for mental health due to the overlap between physical health and mental health, and the somatisation of psychological distress. The background section should include mention of this.

* The abstract should include the time of data collection and the specific area (Jimma). The time of data collection should also be included in the main body of the manuscript.

* 16 health centres were randomly selected from the pool of 56 health centres. What method was used to randomly select these health centres? Was it a random number generator? Was probability proportionate to size used or did
each health centre have an equal probability of being selected (in which case it would be a simple random sample? Were some health centres ruled out due to distance or any other logistical reasons?

* Please make a minor restructure to the measures section of the methods. The first sentence should read something like: “Data was collected using a self-completed questionnaire that contained three sections…” There is no reason that we wait until under the section on knowledge and attitudes that we find out it was a self-completed questionnaire. I would also consider taking the bold off each of these sub-headings and making it one paragraph for simplicity.

* Data collection section of methods:

- Please replace the word “are” with the word “were” on page 8 – first sentence of the section on data collection. In the same sentence you move from past tense to present tense as it currently reads.
- Please delete the sentence “The information collected from the health workers was reported to the supervisor every day”.
- Please delete the sentence “Immediate action was taken in case of inconsistencies in the data or missing data”. Both of these sentences are redundant given you’ve already mentioned that supervisors were monitoring data collection including the completeness of questionnaires.
- Please mention whether the qualitative data collectors had previously undertaken qualitative interviews and what training they were given? The qualitative data is quite thin and it is perhaps because of the inexperience of data collectors.

* Data analysis section: What method was used to check the quality of the data?

* Results page 12: You mention that 92.1% of respondents reported that mental illness is a problem for Ethiopia. That seems like a very broad and vague statement. A problem in what way? Are you referring to people’s views about the prevalence of mental disorders in Ethiopia? Or is it a problem because the country doesn’t currently have the resources to provide mental health care? I’m a bit unclear about this.

* Discussion, page 19, second paragraph. You discuss that participants had a more theoretical rather than practice knowledge. A similar study in India (details below) also reported that mental health knowledge of PHC doctors lacked depth. This study also reported that on average these doctors were seeing 260 patients per week which helps to put the issue into context. Presumably the PHC workers in your study were also operating in a very busy practice environment and this systemic limitation could also be mentioned.

Your discussion seems at times to be stuck in a binary view (i.e. PHC vs specialists) of the options for mental health care. It neglects two important points. One, that the majority of mental health care is provided by families and the person themselves. Two, that structural options may be available (subject to funding) – for example, mental health “champions” could be located within PHCs and trained to a mid-level of expertise. Alternative models may need to be looked at given it is not realistic that brief training alone will make much difference in this context.

The paper lacks any mention of who is providing mental health care given that it is clear PHC workers are currently not doing this adequately. Do people in this part of Ethiopia access traditional, spiritual or religious healers of some sort?

The paper needs an objective or a research question at the end of the background section. It may be a simple reframing of the current text.

Major compulsory revisions

- Limitations section:
  - you should also mention that your study was in just one specific area of Ethiopia and as such there are limits to the generalizability of your findings.
  - the study only looked at the service provider perspective. The perspective of policy-makers and mental health patients could be explored in further research.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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