Reviewer's report

Title: Service network analysis for agricultural mental health

Version: 1 Date: 27 February 2009

Reviewer: Cheryl L Beseler

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This paper represents a network analysis of health services in the rural community of drought-stricken Australia. An important component of this analysis is the evaluation component and rating of the effectiveness of organizational links. Only with this type of analysis can connections be made to needed mental and behavioral health resources available in the farming community. Focusing on the behavioral associations to mental health (referral to rural financial counselors, for example) can increase utilization of the rural community of needed services.

Major compulsory revisions:

Methods

1. The Methods section could be clearer and greater detail would aid in interpreting the results. It seems as if a relevant agency list had to be created for each shire prior to identifying the informants to be surveyed. If this is the case, then the second and third paragraphs should be written in the order that these events were undertaken. It is not clear what the order of events were from the methods section as it is presently written.

2. Who were the agency informants who were interviewed to determine who they linked with?

3. Were the positions in the agency of the informants similar across all agencies?

4. How many agencies were captured in the method described to generate an agency list and is there any way of knowing who might not have been captured?

5. Is there any information on the agencies that did not participate?

6. Why did none of these four shires receive community mental health first aid training in response to the drought if they were in a drought region and why were these shires chosen for study?

7. How many questions comprised the survey?

8. Was it a standard survey?

Analysis: Needs more information.

9. The statistical methods (ANOVA and Mann Whitney test) should be described in the methods section.

10. Was reliability of the survey questions conducted (Cronbach’s alpha).
11. Did the questions that compose the survey undergo a factor analysis or any other type of statistical analysis to see whether they were capturing the items they were designed to capture?
12. How was the survey validated?

Results:
13. In Table 4, how do you account for the difference in p-values for giving information and receiving information?

Discussion:
14. It is not surprising that rural financial counselors are the most highly linked since this is where farmers are likely to go first. What sort of training and support can financial advisors provide and how can they be better trained to recognize farm people with serious mental health needs?
15. What more can be done to get the general practitioners involved in the network? A little more information on interpreting these results and how they can be used in the shires to improve the mental health of farmers in Australia would be appreciated as other farming communities in other countries are struggling with these issues.

Minor essential revisions:
1. Abstract contains some grammatical errors (line 6 under Results and last line of Conclusions).
2. Since the study is conducted to acquire baseline data, what future work do the investigators propose to do and what will they target?
3. Family farms many times experience family tensions and relationship issues, especially in the presence of financial hardship. Are any of these agencies designed to help with family tensions?
4. In the results section it was stated that these four reflect the status quo of rural mental health services networks. How are these different than other shires in Australia?

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.