Reviewer's report

Title: Measuring the health impact of human rights violations related to Australian asylum policies and practices: a mixed methods study

Version: 1 Date: 8 October 2008

Reviewer: Edward J Mills

Reviewer's report:

This paper addresses an important topic. It will be well received by the international community. But, it needs some work. All of my points below should be considered important.

Abstract: Methods. Define TPV is abstract.

Results: There is no point in reporting the chi-2 value.

Introduction: Quote “Perhaps most significant in the evolution of the health and human rights paradigm is the recognition that human rights violations (HRVs) have adverse consequences for health.”

This statement, while I largely agree with it, is problematic. Human rights violations vary from major (such as murder) to minor (lack of voting access). Obviously some human rights violations will have no impact on health. Perhaps change the sentence to something like. Perhaps most important in the evolution of the health and human rights movement is recognition that physical and mental human rights violations, among others, may have severe adverse consequences on health…

Quote: This relationship has been most widely reported in the area of HIV/AIDS, where experience has consistently shown that vulnerability to the virus significantly increases when individuals are deprived of access to care, information, education, or are discriminated against [2].”

Actually, I don’t agree with this. Other conditions have much stronger links, such as torture/mental health; denial of clean water/under-5 mortality; etc, etc. The problem here is that the definition of what is a human right is so variable.

HIV/AIDS is most often associated with non-human rights issues (ie. unprotected consensual sex).

Try not to use the word “significant” when not discussing statistical significance. Perhaps change to “important.”

Introduction is way too long, much of which should be in the discussion section.

End of introduction. Don’t number the research questions.

Methods: Don’t use the word “which”, the correct word is “that.”
Throughout, you list the reference and the page number. This might be used in social sciences, but in healthcare just stick to the number.

Analysis: Quote: Standard linear regression models were used to assess the impact of visa status on selected self-rated mental health outcomes, after controlling for potential confounding factors.

- Don’t you mean logistic regression?

Quote: “Data were transformed where variables were extremely skewed and/or contained several outliers which significantly influenced the distribution.”

- I don’t understand why to transform the data for outliers. Outliers are generally considered to be real events and should be kept in.

- Seems to me this is a post-hoc analysis.

Results: Don’t use the +/- sign for standard deviation. Just use the acronym SD.

Don’t use asterisks for the p-values. Use the exact p-values throughout the manuscript.

Don’t report the z and t-values. There is no point. Just stick to P-values and actual effects where available.

I think you should have a senior methodologist go through the results section and trip out all the useless statistical reporting. The stats may be correct, but the reporting of them displays no knowledge of publishing.

Although qualitative is not my specialty, or interest, it seems odd to me to use participants names in the quotes (even if they are made up).

I don’t understand the point of quoting Mann. It is odd to see quotes in a manuscript for a health journal.

Quote: This study clearly demonstrates that, despite vocal claims (usually by governments) to the 22 contrary, “human rights [do] matter” [37, p.1], not only because of the moral principles they aspire to uphold, but also because of the significant interconnection between rights and public health.

- Just drop these loaded sentences.

Why did it take so long to write this paper up? It seems to me that this is a disappointment as it could have potentially influenced things back in 2005.

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: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests