Author's response to reviews

Title: The Forsaken Mental Health of the Indigenous Peoples - A Moral Case of Outrageous Exclusion in Latin America

Authors:

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Author's response to reviews: see over
September 21, 2009

Editor
BMC International Health and Human Rights.

Dear Editor,

RE: MS: 1469246906251050

We thank the reviewers for their valuable suggestions. All the concerns raised by the reviewers for the manuscript #1469246906251050 have been carefully taken into account, and the manuscript has been modified accordingly. We here submit the new revised manuscript. The copyediting has been made by a native English-speaking colleague with publishing experience.

Please also find below a point-by-point response to the reviewers’ concerns highlighting each of the changes made and the reasons for these changes.

Thanking you in advance,

Sincerely yours,

Mario Incayawar, M.D.
Director
Runajambi Institute
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<td>&quot;However, it quickly became a point of interest for local politics, rather than a mental health promoting institution, and was eventually run, not by health experts, but by political partisans.&quot; - not sure what is meant by “a point of interest for local politics”</td>
<td>We thank the reviewer for pointing to this unclear passage. The text has been rewritten to eliminate confusion, on page 7. The text now reads “Unfortunately, political partisanship soon undermined its operation as it became the main criteria for staff selection, rather than health and mental health expertise.”</td>
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<td>“Indigenous Peoples have learned, whether consciously or unconsciously, to be suspicious of the dominant society’s intentions in their regard. This affects their perception of many matters of life with mainstream society, and does not exclude health care. At the local level, many Indigenous patients still perceive hospitals, clinics, and primary care health posts as dangerous places where they undergo the risk of being inadequately treated, humiliated or insulted by racist doctors or even killed.” - I am still unclear why Indigenous people fear being killed by racist doctors – is this a realistic fear? Has it happened in the past? Or does it reflect some generalization from other forms of state organized violence?</td>
<td>This is a complex topic that deserves attention on its own. Please note that the corresponding author is working on an article that will address this topic directly and fully. For this paper, the text (page 7) has been rewritten to provide a clearer explanation: “Organizations such as PAHO, ministries of health, and mental health care services remain hermetic and distant to the Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, local governments often consider Indigenous Peoples as second class citizens, outsiders, and inferiors[4]. Consequently, they are literally excluded from the conventional Western health services. At the local level, many Indigenous patients still perceive hospitals, clinics, and primary care health posts as dangerous places where they undergo the risk of being inadequately treated, humiliated, insulted or even killed by racist doctors[5, 15]. They are scared to visit hospitals or doctors. As observed by the senior author (MI), they sometimes even refuse to seek medical care, preferring to die at home. The Indigenous Peoples have learned, through a history of social exclusion, racial discrimination, dispossession, and violence, to be suspicious of the dominant society’s intentions in their regard. They view the Latin American governments as entities that do not represent...&quot;</td>
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their interests, but rather that perpetuate a policy of centuries-long colonial oppression[5]. The Indigenous Peoples’ views and health seeking behavior is probably the result of these historical experiences.”

In advocating for research, the authors could note the activities in Canada supporting research through the CIHR Institute for Aboriginal Peoples Health.

We thank the reviewers for this suggestion. Efforts made in Canada and USA are now mentioned on page 8. The text now reads:

“Commendable efforts are currently being made in Canada and the USA to tackle these mental health problems through research. The Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health, part of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Native American Research Center for Health initiative, a partnership of the Indian Health Service and the National Institutes of Health, are government research funding models that could be followed by the Latin American States.”

Reviewer 2 - Raul Montenegro

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<td>It's interesting to note that among indigenous communities there are peoples living in self decided isolation, or close to, and peoples having adopted different degrees of non-indigenous cultural patterns. The western concept of &quot;poverty&quot; cannot be used all over this gradient of situations. For foreign analysts, those indigenous peoples living in self-decided isolation could be seen as &quot;poors&quot;, and those having adopted non-indigenous consumption patterns as &quot;non-poors&quot;. Nevertheless, those perceived as &quot;poors&quot; (peoples living in self-decided isolation e.g.) consider they are not &quot;western&quot; poors. Poverty need a series of definitions</td>
<td>We thank the reviewers for the comment. However, we must decide to deliberately leave out this point, as it is not deemed relevant to this paper's particular purpose; that is, to discuss the mental health care situation for Indigenous Peoples in Latin America. Data on poverty-related health problems are only given as per default indicators of the situation, for as to the best of our knowledge, no study has yet been conducted on the mental health status of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America, and thus, no data on this particular matter are yet available.</td>
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