Reviewer's report

Title: Minor psychiatric disorders among Brazilian ragpickers: a cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 12 December 2005

Reviewer: Manas Ray

Reviewer's report:

General
Evaluation report of the manuscript "Minor psychiatric disorders among Brazilian ragpickers: a cross-sectional study" by da Silva et al.

There are millions of ragpickers in developing countries throughout the world. Although their job is hazardous, physical or mental health of these poor people are often neglected. Against this background, the objective of this study is significant. But the study needs major improvement in all sections.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Although the paper is on MPD, least importance has been given on this psychological problem in Materials and methods, Results and Discussion. The authors have not described MPD except for “four on physical symptoms and sixteen on psycho-emotional disturbance”. But the readers who may not be well acquainted with mental health problems may ask the question: what are these symptoms and disturbances? What is the highest score of each of these 20 questions? What is the highest and lowest possible total achievable? What precautions did the authors take to eliminate possible denial of symptom (faking good) or hypochondria?

2. The prevalence of MPD may vary in different physiological, social and environmental conditions. I wonder whether the authors included women who were pregnant, breast feeding or on oral contraceptive during the survey. These conditions may influence the outcome (MPD). Similarly, history of malignancy, tuberculosis and cardiovascular problems, marked variation in body mass index (BMI) and current use of medicine may influence MPD. Have the author considered these points? It is important to incorporate inclusion and exclusion criteria in Materials and methods.

3. Comparison of demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the ragpickers and referents and statistical data (p value) are absent. This information should be displayed in a Table, otherwise the readers would be at a loss to know a simple fact like how many of male and female ragpickers were included in this study. No data is available on age distribution, years of ragpicking, indoor air quality and others that could have influenced the outcome. For example, since the ragpickers are poorer, they may be using unprocessed solid biomass as cooking fuel in contrast to cleaner fuel like LPG by referents. Biomass smoke contains a host of chemicals that are potentially neurotoxic. In that case, greater prevalence of MPD in ragpickers may be linked to biomass use rather than ragpicking. Use of mosquito repellants at home is another potential contributor. The authors should work on these possibilities and incorporate the findings in the manuscript.

4. Statistical analysis. Emphasis should be given more on comparison between ragpickers and controls. The Tables are not easy to comprehend. The authors may consider inclusion of logistic regression, OR values with 95% CI in text and Tables. Separate Table or graph should be added on
i. the prevalence of MPD, in general, and ii. Some of the important symptoms of MPD in relation to years of ragpicking.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. The article is not easy reading. The English is poor. Page should be marked.
2. Abstract: 3rd line ‘precarious’ may be replaced by more appropriate word; Results, p value is needed (33.6%, p<?). Key words, ‘mental health’ may be dropped.
3. Background is scrappy and not pointed. It should be streamlined. 2nd para: To this list Mari et et al. ‘ added .......... nutritional problems [4].’ 3rd para line 2: leading cause of lost work..... 4th para. International Labour Organization (ILO) has reported that…. 5th para 3rd line ‘less than twice the level’ is not self explanatory. Next line: about 173 US $ per month. Last para ‘A comparison paper ........ 2005’ should be omitted.
4. Methods. Lacks basic information about the MPD, and the detailed methodology of questionnaire survey, elimination of bias, background information on physiologic state of the female participants, indoor air quality. Last para; only mention the reference.
5. Results. Needs restructuring and streamlining. Use subheadings. Data on living conditions should be transferred to Materials and methods. Omit ‘successfully’ in 2nd line. 3rd para change to “US $ 80.1 and 182.3”; 2nd and last para, don’t use reference [10] in results. 3rd para, explain ABIPEME. Under MPD: 3rd para how are these data related to ragpicking?
6. While discussing the findings the authors should emphasize more on data published in scientific journals than in websites.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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 interest in relation to the paper I reviewed.