Reviewer's report

Title: A systematic review of the incidence of schizophrenia: the distribution of rate items and the influence of methodology, urbanicity, sex and migrant status.

Version: Date: 29 September 2003

Reviewer: Jaana Maria Suvisaari

Reviewer's report:

Review

Manuscript: A systematic review of the incidence of schizophrenia: the distribution of rate items and the influence of methodology, urbanicity, sex and migrant status

This systematic review on the incidence on schizophrenia is most welcome, very thorough, adequately analysed, and should be published. However, it is far too long, and should be shortened. My suggestions are as follows:

Introduction (Background):

The introduction is far too long, and could be better organized. For example, the section "Why is a systematic review needed?" could be taken away completely. This question is already answered in the previous section. The "Ways to measure the incidence of schizophrenia" section should also be written much more concisely, and some of its contents, e.g. the description of the benefits of the smaller samples, could be left out. While interesting, they are not essential for the article. Some of its contents actually belong to the Methods, and do not need to be mentioned here.

All the aims and hypotheses could be gathered in one section. Now they are mentioned first at the end of sections "Distribution and range of data", "Methodology, overall quality, and the incidence of schizophrenia", "Sex and the incidence of schizophrenia", "Urbanicity and the incidence of schizophrenia", "Migrant status and the incidence of schizophrenia", and then again in the "Aims of the study". I think it would be better to have them in the Aims only. Also, I would change the places of the sections "Methodology, overall quality, and the incidence of schizophrenia" and "Distribution and range of data".

The section "Caveats - what systematic reviews can and cannot do" could be omitted. Its contents are more suitable for the Methods and Discussion, and the description of statistical methods and reasons for choosing them in the Methods is already detailed enough.

Methods:

The Methods could be written more concisely.

The Methods could begin with "Identification of studies", and "Included studies" could be moved after it. This would be a more logical order.

The "Quality scores" section: authors could describe the quality scores briefly in the text, too. The two apologizing sentences concerning the arbitrariness of the items are unnecessary.

"Presentation of the data" and "Analysis of the data" could be combined, and they should be written
more concisely.

Results:

Although the number of tables is already quite substantial, I suggest that one table could be added. Now the Results begins with several pages describing different qualities of the included studies. These could be presented in a table, and e.g. these long lists of countries could be avoided.

There is a lot of redundancy in the tables and figures. Most of the figures can be left out. They could be available as additional material in the web. These are my minimum suggestions:

- Only the top figure from Figure 2 is necessary.
- Figure 3 could be left out.
- Tables 2-4 could be combined.
- Figures 5-10 could be left out.
- Tables 5-8 and 9-10 could be combined.
- Table 11 could be left out, the corresponding figure is more informative.
- Figures 12 and 14 could be left out, the figure for persons only could be included from Figure 13.
- Tables 12-14 could be combined.

Since most of the tables are made using the same format, they could be combined even more than what I suggested above.

The authors should use different symbols for different groups in one figure. The different shades of grey are not clear enough.

Concerning incidence in special groups: the authors might add one sentence to comment whether the incidence of schizophrenia in any special group seems to be exceptionally high or low.

The Discussion:

The Discussion is good. Only one suggestion: Table 15 could be left out, and the recommendations could be mentioned in the text.

**Advice on publication:** Accept after minor compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** A paper of considerable merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None