Reviewer's report

Title: Resilience to trauma in the two largest cities of Brazil: a cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 5 September 2013

Reviewer: Maria Steenkamp

Reviewer's report:

In this study, the authors examine the extent of positive adaptation (‘resilience’) to childhood trauma in two large Brazilian cities. Because most epidemiological research on post-trauma outcomes has come from Western populations, the study’s contribution rests mainly on providing insight into rates of trauma and potentially associated psychopathology in Brazil.

The primary limitations of the study include: (a) a simplistic conceptualization of resilience, and (b) somewhat problematic use of the PANAS. First, as defined by the authors, “resilience is a process where, despite a significant threat to the individual, the quality of adaptation is good”. Resilience is operationalized as a lack of caseness – however, the absence of psychopathology does not necessarily indicate good adaptation.

Second, the rationale of the inclusion of the PANAS is underdeveloped and not entirely convincing, particularly the authors’ notion that it is a mechanism in the development of resilience, rather than simply a byproduct of having psychopathology (in which participants with a mental disorder would be expected to endorse more negative affect). The authors also at several points inappropriately infer causality, for example when hypothesizing that “both positive and negative affects play a role in the development of positive adaptation to trauma” (p.3).

Discretionary Revisions:

1. The title may be more accurate if it specified that the study examined childhood trauma, that is: Resilience to childhood trauma in the two largest cities of Brazil: A cross-sectional study.

2. In the Introduction, the authors state: “although stressful experiences may render individuals more susceptible to subsequent stressors, there is evidence that stress may enhance and individual’s resistance to new hardships”. Citations should be provided to this effect.

3. On page 5, the authors mention an “intensity of trauma variable” – more information should be provided on this variable, for example, who evaluated this intensity and using which criteria?

4. Overall, the Discussion section could be tightened and reworked for flow, as it often discusses variables not assessed in this study (e.g., parenting behavior, attachment style, genetics of positive and negative affect).
5. Rates of the different disorders assessed should be provided. For example, what percentage of participants met criteria for PTSD?

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare I have no competing interests