Reviewer’s report

Title: Community-based mental health treatments for survivors of torture and militant attacks in Southern Iraq: a randomized control trial

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Reviewer: Angela Nickerson

Reviewer’s report:

I have reviewed the manuscript “Community-based mental health treatments for survivors of torture and militant attacks in Southern Iraq: A randomized control trial”. This study reported on randomized controlled trials comparing two psychological interventions to wait-list control groups in two regions in Southern Iraq. I found this manuscript to be well-written and detailing an important study that contributes significantly to the literature. I thought the reporting of the procedures in this study was very good. In particular, the transparent reporting of processes and challenges associated with conducting an RCT in a LMIC setting was commendable. I have the following comments for the authors:

Minor essential revisions

1. It would have been helpful to include more information on the locally developed study instrument in terms of number of items and example items.
2. When reporting test-retest reliability, it would be useful to provide information on time between testing sessions.
3. It wasn’t clear to me what “A median difference in scale scores between those diagnosed with and without a condition (on a scale of 0 to 3)” referred to. Were participants’ diagnoses rated on a scale of 0 to 3?
4. On page 8, the authors refer to ROC analyses. Are these published elsewhere? If so, the reference should be provided. If not, more detail should be provided.
5. Could the authors provide the rate of missing data in this study?
6. It wasn’t clear to me what the authors meant by “the adjusted-model results were almost identical to the results of the unadjusted model for both CETA and CPT”. Could the authors clarify?

Discretionary revisions

1. The authors also stated that “Criterion validity was supported for all scales except for depression among women”. Could some supporting evidence be provided for this statement?
2. On page 8, the authors refer to a locally validated HTQ. More information could be provided about this scale, including how many items, on which scale it was scored etc.
3. What comprised the screening instrument referred to on page 8?
4. I found the Common Treatment Elements Approach interesting and compelling. However, it seemed to me that selecting and implementing multiple modules in a tailored fashion would require a considerable degree of clinical skill – perhaps more than implementing a standardized intervention approach such as CPT. Could the authors comment on the implications of this for disseminating this intervention in contexts where limited training and supervision was available?

5. In the Sample Size section, it wasn’t clear to me what “A standard design effect of 1.5 given a lack of other studies” was referring to. Could the authors clarify?

6. Did the authors look at therapist effects? How many therapists implemented treatment in each arm?

7. The discussion was generally well-written and provided a thoughtful consideration of the study. At times, more context could be provided. For example, in the first paragraph, the authors state that “Rahman and colleagues found effect sizes for CBT of 0.70 – 0.80 for depression, disability and functioning”, without stating where the study was conducted or with which population.

8. At times, the distinction between the result and discussion are not entirely clear. For example, the authors include the “implementation” section in the results, without providing data. Perhaps this would be better placed in the discussion. Further, in the discussion the authors state that the investigated various factors including the effect sizes of the therapy, differences in context and the possibility of misconduct. It is not always clear whether quantitative or qualitative methods were used to investigate these factors; or whether the authors are simply considering them theoretically. This could be clarified.

**Level of interest:** An exceptional article

**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 that I have no competing interests