Reviewer’s report

Title: The impact of Immigration Detention on Mental Health: A Systematic Review

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Reviewer: Astrid Kamperman

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript describes a systematic review on the mental health and well-being of people having been subject to immigrant detention. The authors conclude that immigrant detention is detrimental to mental health of adults and children. The topic is very relevant, and the paper is well written. However, the search is outdated and does not fully represent the research questions.

The research questions are epidemiological in nature: prevalence & risk factors. To answer these questions you will need quantitative data, representative sets, relevant control groups etc. So, why are qualitative studies included? There seems to be a mismatch between the research questions and the employed methods. In the results section, there is also room for well-being, and subjective experience of detention, which falls outside the scope of the study.

I want to compliment the authors with their decision to register their review in Prospero.

Although the search is fully compliant with the Prospero record, I fail to understand why no records are searched younger than 2015. What is the point of creating an outdated review? Especially since authors aim to provide a more up to date review (page 6, sent. 134). I would suggest to amend the Prospero record, and update the search.

I like the idea to enrich the search with specialized journals. However, why did the authors choose to screen these journals for the 2013-2015 period, only?

Prospero mentions more/other research questions than reported in this article. What happened with these other research questions?

The authors use very broad inclusion criteria. With respect to their primary outcome: the prevalence of mental health problems, this is problematic. They have no restriction criteria for definition or assessment of mental health problems. Even neuropsychologic functioning and quality of life measures are included. Given this broad operationalisation, how do the authors expect to come up with a meaningful prevalence rate?

Under extracted data, no qualifiers were extracted regarding an important variable in this review, i.e. detention. The authors mention the various regimes regarding immigrant detention, therefore
I had expected more details to be extracted. The set mentioned does not reflect the data extracted. For instance, what about the risk factors?

How did detention and detention characteristics fit in with the risk factors? When reading this manuscript, it seems like detention as such is considered a risk factor, but that the authors also search for subgroups of detainees with higher risk profiles. Both interpretations are relevant, but should be clarified beforehand.

Please provide more details on the critical appraisal skills programme.

Overall, sum scores on study quality are not recommended (see for instance the publication series of Matthias Egger in BMJ). The manuscript would benefit from a quality table, detailing the most relevant quality criteria in light of the research questions.

Figure 1: please add numbers to the exclusion categories. All the grey literature/abstract/commentary categories could be aggregated. They are not that meaningful. However, the content related categories would benefit from more details.

Did the authors take the possibility of overlapping samples into account? See Steel, Brabeck.

How come an unpublished study by Sen is included? It is not a peer reviewed publication, and falls beyond the set search period.

The introduction is focused on asylum seekers and refugees. Therefore, I was surprised to see that the authors also included studies on detention of immigrants (without a refugee background). I would suggest to set the inclusion criteria more stringent to better reflect the theoretical background.

In the results section, the quality of the studies is not taken into account.

The authors place quite some importance on the results regarding length of detention and symptom severity. However, only 2 studies mention this. One (high quality) study with a large sample did not find any significant results, and a second, low quality, study did. Therefore, I feel the conclusion is not supported by the data.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes
Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?  
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

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