Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0 Date: 07 Feb 2018

Reviewer: Zachary Steel

Reviewer's report:

This updated review of mental health research into the impact of immigration detention on mental health is timely and comes at an appropriate time following the first review published by this authorship group in 2009. It is likely to be a seminal paper that will aggregate findings on an important contemporary social issue.

At the moment the review is in part written from UK point of view which I would suggest is should be expanded to make the paper more congruent with the global review of the evidence from multiple jurisdictions. It would be preferable if the two paragraphs that give the professional mental health response and inquiry in the UK could make reference to the similar developments that have happened in Australia, Canada, USA and a number of European countries.

The sentence "Many countries resort to detaining refugees in immigration detention centres whilst their applications for asylum are processed" may be more accurately stated "Many countries resort to detaining refugees in immigration detention centres whilst their applications for asylum are processed or following an adverse refugee decision outcome"

The statistics provided for individuals in detention in the UK in paragraph 2 could be expanded further to include other jurisdictions again showing the global size of the practice - these are available from the

The sentence "For many asylum seekers with a history of major trauma, it is reminiscent of contexts in their country of origin where they had been deprived of their liberty and human rights" should be supported with appropriate research citations.

The search criteria are well described, and a detailed example is provided. It should be noted that I have briefly examined possible papers identified in the last 2 years that may not have been indexed at the time of the search but which I think would meet inclusion criteria - these should be reviewed and the search should be run for the last 2 years. I have listed these below.

I also identified one earlier study that may meet inclusion criteria that should be reviewed by the authors by Momartin et al 2006.
Consideration should be given about whether a number of studies that examined self-harm and suicide would meet inclusion criteria - to this end I have identified two papers that provided empirical data on prevalence and incidence in detention Hendrick et al (2017) and Cohen (2008).

I also note three research studies that have been either undertaken by a government contracted evaluation or reported by an NGO providing services in detention which provide methodological information that would allow their quality to be assessed but which are currently excluded by the restriction to peer review journal publications that could also be considered for inclusions.

The results are well laid out although there is some lack of clarity regarding the scope of papers considered under the respective sections. For example it is stated that 2 studies included diagnostic clinical assessments but such assessments were also undertaken of parents reported in the Steel et al (2004), Mares & Jureidini (2004) and Lorek et al (2009) papers. While these are reported subsequently they are also relevant to the earlier section unless specifically excluded. This could be better clarified but a clear statement outlining how the data is going to be reported and especially if parental mental health data.

The authors should comment on whether the measures used in the quality of life studies may have been in part compounded by the restricted opportunities of the detention environment which may also relate to the lack of association with time

The conclusion by the that "All studies demonstrate a significant relationship between detention duration and mental health deterioration" need to restated to make clear that it was all studies that examined this association, perhaps reporting the N of studies and even n of combined sample.

The section on research which children and families in the discussion should restate how many studies and the samples sizes involved. Also suggest not limiting discussion of practice to UK and Europe but reporting on the practices of family and child detention in other regions of the world.

The discussion of the limitations rightly point out the problems with sampling and the possibility that more samples with more severe MH complaints were selected. This however can be more specifically examined by the authors by examining the prevalence rates reported by studies that did not have these limitations especially with the inclusion of the more recent papers noted below. While this does not fully address the limitation it does provide some evidence on the extent to which studies not affected by these limitations continue to report comparatively high prevalence estimates.

I would encourage the authors to consider the provision of more clear advice regarding the practice of immigration detention on the basis of this evidence base. It would strike me that over all the data provides strong evidence that the use of immigration detention is associated with mental health harms to those affected and that the level of harm increases with the duration of
detention. It also highlights vulnerable groups who are at particular risk of harm including those with mental health problems and a prior history of exposures to potentially traumatic events.

Other References to review.


Earlier Peer Review Studies that may meet inclusion criteria

Non-Peer Reviewed Studies


Self-Harm and Suicide Reports


Earlier Peer Review Studies that may meet inclusion criteria


Non-Peer Reviewed Studies


Self-Harm and Suicide Reports


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

Yes
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.

Yes

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If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

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