Reviewer’s report

Title: Mental health service use by recent immigrants from different world regions and by non-immigrants in Ontario, Canada: a cross-sectional study

Version: 2
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Reviewer: Laurence Kirmayer

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Review of Mental health service use by recent immigrants from different world regions and by non-immigrants in Ontario, Canada: a cross-sectional study

1) This is a potentially useful paper that needs some further work. By comparing administrative data, the authors establish that there are significant variations in rates of use of mental health services (in primary and specialty care) among immigrants from different regions. They do not sufficiently address the limitations of the data and methods of analysis and the results risk having negative effects on policy by (i) conflating use with level of need; and (ii) encouraging overly broad generalizations about regions of the world without identifying the features of migration form that part of the world to Canada that influence service utilization rates.

Major Compulsory Revisions

2) The research questions are not clearly stated – presumably they are limited to exploring potential variations in rates of mental health service utilization by region of origin.

3) The authors miss an opportunity to address the more interesting and important policy-relevant question of what the actual mediators or determinants are of the differences they observe. They examine only some of the key indicators available for both immigrants and long-term residents, (i.e. sex and neighborhood income); they do not do any analyses within the immigrant group itself to examine the impact of variables likely to account for the difference: e.g. reason for migration (refugee, family reunification), language proficiency, level of education, refugee status. Consequently there results are of limited interest and generalizability.

4) Moreover, a major concern is that by using the crude category of region of origin and not identifying the underlying factors, the authors contribute to stereotypes based on these categories. Indeed, the variations reflect Canada’s own immigration policy and pathways to entry more than any characteristics of people in this regions (some of which like South or East Asian represent major portions of the global population!). Moreover, these results are likely to change with changes in patterns of migration from within any given regions – all of which make the results of dubious value for policy.

5) Finally, it is important to note that service use does not correspond to need so
that without further data there is no way to know whether groups under-utilize services and have unmet need, or have no need for further services.

Minor Essential Revisions

6) There are some grammatical problems in the text, e.g. in the first sentence: “so does the attention on immigrant” would read better as “so does the attention to immigrant” The whole text should be carefully proofread.

7) Several of the references seem not to directly address the point for which the authors’ cite them [e.g. #6, 39] or are obscure and not accessible to anyone [e.g. #4].

8) There are missing references, notably to some of the few previous studies on immigrant utilization of mental health services, e.g.


9) As well, more discussion of potential reasons for underutilization would be useful:


Discretionary Revisions

10) And it is surprising to see limited reference to the extensive discussion in the literature of the healthy immigrant effect in Canada, e.g.:

Blair, A. H., & Schneeberg, A. (2014). Changes in the ‘Healthy Migrant Effect’in Canada: Are Recent Immigrants Healthier than They were a Decade Ago?. Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health, 16(1), 136-142.


Med, 59(8), 1613-1627.

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests