Author’s response to reviews

Title: A model explaining refugee experiences of the Australian healthcare system: A systematic review of refugee perceptions.

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To the Editor,

On behalf of the research team, I thank you for further consideration of our paper. We appreciate the feedback and look forward to publishing the article.

The paper manuscript has been resubmitted to IHHR Editorial Manager and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

The concerns addressed in the following pages.

Should you have any further concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me with the details above.

Kind regards,

Michael Au

Principal Investigator
Reviewer Concerns

Reviewer 1:

1. In the abstract (conclusions), the authors report that "There is a paucity of research in rural and remote areas and further evidence is needed in these settings." However, no findings are reported in the "results" section of the abstract that would justify that conclusion.

AUTHOR: Please see the section under “Results” under “Study Characteristics” and under “Study Settings.” We note that:

Majority of studies were carried out in Australian capital cities. Half of all the primary studies were performed in Melbourne.[17-19, 27, 28, 31, 33, 35, 39, 43, 44, 46, 51-53, 56] Three studies did not specify the study setting.[36, 37, 47] Only one study was performed in a rural or regional area.[40]

This was also addressed in-depth under “Discussion”, highlighting the paucity of research in rural and remote areas.

The authors are not confident that the review findings represent Australia as a whole. Half of all the primary studies were performed in Melbourne. Research is largely concentrated in metropolitan areas of Victoria, New South Wales, and South-East Queensland. Only one study investigated rural or regional areas.[40] There currently exists a gap in the available literature in rural and regional areas. Further research is needed in these settings, particularly in Northern Australia (Northern Territory and North Queensland), as refugee services and their community contexts will be considerably different compared to their metropolitan counterparts.

EDITOR: The reviewer’s comment refers to omission of reporting data on the paucity of research in rural and remote areas within the “results” section of the actual abstract (not the manuscript as a whole). If one is to make conclusions and recommendations such as “There is a paucity of research in rural and remote areas and further evidence is needed in these settings.” in the abstract, then one would expect to see this data reported in the “result” section of the abstract. Please add this data to the “results” section of the abstract.

RESPONSE: Apologies for the misunderstanding. This has now been updated under the results section of the abstract.

Results: The final synthesis included all 35 articles consisting of one systematic review, 7 mixed methods studies, and 27 qualitative studies. Only one study was from a regional or rural area.
2. I am not quite clear about an aspect of inclusion criteria. Was it required that all participants in a study were refugees or up to a certain percentage (and if the latter, which percentage?) I am asking for clarifications as Wohler et al., 2017 review appears to be focusing on "culturally and linguistically diverse women" (who would not be necessarily refugee) and at least another paper (Valibhoy, Szwarc, et al. 2017 - Description of barriers young people face in accessing mental health services in Australia) does not seem to be specific to refugees. If they were qualitative studies, how did the authors specifically retrieve the factors which were specific to refugees?

AUTHOR: Feedback acknowledged. In this review, any articles that clearly examined refugee perceptions even if they had a mix population (e.g. involving immigrants) were considered. Only the findings that pertained to refugees were coded for analysis. At times, this was clearly delineated, and it was easy for assessors to incorporate this. In other times, some reviews did not identify which information pertained to which population and as such, it was penalized during the appraisal process and subsequently affected our confidence in the review findings. For reviews, the primary articles that they cited were reviewed to ensure that the findings the review drew upon fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

Therefore, articles such as Wohler et al. 2017’s review examining culturally and linguistically diverse women was included as their article clearly identified some findings relevant to refugees (which was clearly stated). We acknowledged articles that had mixed populations under ‘Study Characteristics’ ‘Participants’:

The perceptions of approximately 1813 refugees were captured. Five studies had a mix of refugees and migrants and did not identify those with refugee status.[31, 32, 44, 46, 57] Furthermore, some studies appear to have published different findings from the same data set.[19, 28, 30, 45] This has been clarified under ‘Eligibility Criteria’ and ‘Data Collection Process, Data Items and Analysis’.

EDITOR: Thank you for this clarification. However, based on the information provided in the “Methods – Eligibility” section of the manuscript, a reader may still be left confused as to what happened to the “mixed data” – was it included in the analysis or not. The author states “Studies that had refugees as part of a heterogeneous population were included provided that it clearly stated that some participants were refugees. However, only data relating to refugees were reviewed.” From this statement one would conclude that any data from which the reviewer was unable to extrapolate exact data only for refugees was omitted from the analysis. However, later on under “Data Collection Process, Data Items and Analysis” it is stated that even in those cases the data was included in the analysis but the particular paper was then penalized for it. This needs to be better clarified for the readers.
RESPONSE: Thank you for the feedback. This has been updated under Methods-Eligibility. We removed the second sentence that was under Methods-Eligibility as it did not relate to the eligibility criteria, but rather data analysis, which may have been the source of confusion.

Eligibility Criteria:

Studies that had refugees as part of a heterogenous population were included provided that it clearly stated that some participants were refugees.

Data Collection Process, Data Items, and Analysis

For studies that had a heterogenous population involving participants other than just refugees, only the data that was related to refugees was coded. Where it was not clear to assessors if certain data related to refugees, data was included for analysis, but this affected its appraisal performance and the confidence in the review findings.

3. I don't believe that not capturing the experiences of health service providers in delivering care to refugees is a limitation as it was not part of the research question. It could be a suggestion for further research which appears to have been taken up and brought forward by the same team of researchers. It would be interesting to discuss instead limitations of the inclusion criteria as I mentioned above. Were only studies in which all participants were refugees included? Or were there also others in which refugees were only part of the sample? If in the latter case the findings on refugees were analysed separately from other participants, how was this done? If there will be more clarity on this, then limitations of the approach used may be discussed.

AUTHOR: Feedback acknowledged and the section regarding “not capturing the experiences of health service providers” has been moved to “Implications” as it discusses potential areas of research.

We acknowledge the limitation of our inclusion criteria regarding the participants and how we managed it. This has been updated under “Limitations”.

EDITOR: A sentence clearly stating that studies that included refugees in their sample but did not report separate data and findings for refugee sub-sample were included in the review analysis.

RESPONSE: Thank you for the feedback and this has been appropriately updated under Limitations.

One limitation of this study may have been related to the inclusion criteria of studies. Studies that had explicit mention of refugees even if they belonged to a heterogenous group involving non-refugees (e.g. immigrants and skilled workers) were included for analysis. Although the authors made every effort to identify the relevant findings that pertained to refugees, some
studies did not clearly delineate their population characteristics which made it difficult for the assessor to adequately consider the data.[31, 32, 44, 48, 59] These studies were included in the review analysis but were subject to lower levels of confidence when it was appraised. For systematic reviews, the primary papers were referred to ensure that findings related to refugee populations.[60]