Reviewer's report

Title: Social support attenuates the link between torture exposure and post-traumatic stress disorder among male and female Syrian refugees in Sweden

Version: 0 Date: 16 Feb 2019

Reviewer: Qais Alemi

Reviewer's report:

Dear Dr. Shabila, thank you for the opportunity to review this important and timely manuscript. The authors should be applauded in their effort. This paper examines the impact of torture experiences on PTSD and how this relationship might be influenced by social support and gender. Few studies have examined torture exposure among refugees, namely Syrians—whose numbers have grown at unprecedented levels in EU nations.

Introduction: While the authors reference torture being a grave violation of human rights, a stronger conceptualization of this construct is needed. What types of acts define torture? What does this look like in previous studies of refugees?; Explain why it is "of immense importance to identify protective factors" (why would this information be useful, from a practical standpoint?); references 9 and 10 do not pertain to studies of refugees, this needs to be clarified in the text; some theoretical or conceptual underpinnings of social support (a definition because this construct may come in various forms) and the mechanism by which social support operates in terms of acting as a stress buffer would be helpful (reference number 11 would be helpful). And what is it about men that explains their higher social support than women in Sweden (contents in Discussion section suggest that there should be no difference given pre-migratory losses, and the fact that previous data by the authors (references 8 and 21) suggests that both gender groups are equally affected by trauma, thereby affecting their propensity to seek support elsewhere? Also, referencing a recent study of Syrian refugees by Çelebi et al. may be useful in further explaining the protective effect of co-ethnic ties.

Method: No issues noted.

Results: Present results in order of study aims presented in background section. Moderation model presented first, and mediation second. The heavy focus on the ESSI throughout the paper raises questions as to what the central aim of this study actually was; to validate the ESSI? Or, to determine effects of social support on PTSD and torture, and relatedly the gendered effects of social support on PTSD and torture? Usually, in non-validation-type studies discussion of the use of a new measure and associated factor analyses could be presented in the methods section where the instrument is initially introduced; thereby allowing for a more deliberate focus on aims 1 and 2, in this case—which would then also align with the the title of study as well. Discussion: Assumptions and interpretations are valid. Discussion of the mediating role of social support acting as a potential protective buffer is interpreted well, as is the interpretation of why social support functions similarly for both men and women.
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

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I recommend additional statistical review

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?
If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

'I declare that I have no competing interests'

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal