**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:** 14 Mar 2019

**Reviewer:** Kate Murray

**Reviewer's report:**

This is an interesting article that includes a large sample of Syrian refugees selected from the Total Population Register covering all persons with permanent residency in Sweden. This is a rare sample within the refugee resettlement context and represents a key strength of the paper. Structural Equation Modeling was used to examine the factor structure of the ENRICHD Social Support Inventory and the potential mediating role of social support between torture and PTSD. Potential moderating effects for gender were also assessed. The results from this large Syrian sample provide insights into these relationships in the post-settlement context in Sweden.

I have a few recommendations for revisions to the paper. First off, it was unclear the rationale for the examination of the factor structure of the ESSI. Nowhere in the introduction does it indicate this is needed and therefore when Aim 3 is introduced, it is unexpected and unclear as to why the authors are completing these analyses. The text offered on page 12 is likely better suited for the Introduction. But, further, I wonder what the utility of these analyses are for the current data. The ESSI is only 6 items and given the content of those items it is unlikely that it would be a useful scale for looking at any subscales within the measure (e.g., instrumental versus emotional support). I would have been appeased by a reporting of the internal consistency of the scale, which is never stated. If this was a multi-dimensional scale, then I could see the utility of examining the factor structure a bit more clearly. The inclusion of these analyses needs to be further justified.

Second, data from the HTQ needs to be made clearer and the rationale for selecting a single item and using a logistic approach is needed. I can't seem to find any data on PTSD scores (either in continuous form with comparisons to other refugee samples) or case/non-case numbers within this sample. This is important information for having a sense of the sample beyond the SEM data. Similarly, I do not see how many people in the current sample have experienced torture. It would be useful to report this information alongside how many people experienced other forms of trauma on the RTHC. The rationale for focusing specifically on torture, as opposed to trauma more generally (and perhaps not examining both) needs to be clearer. Were the authors specifically interested in torture as an extreme form of trauma? Do they think the role of social support is different for torture than to other forms of trauma (e.g., sexual violence)? Why? The reference to torture as a complex trauma (p. 1) needs further explanation/justification.

Third, some further reflection on the role of social support within this Syrian population is needed. The comment is made that a lack of social support may be due to trauma-related avoidance. I think this is a valid point, though one that becomes particularly challenged within
the current sample as through forced displacement social networks invariably change. The social isolation experienced by many people from a refugee background may be a natural consequence of the uprooting of their social worlds. Some further discussion of this within the limitations and future directions is warranted. Also, on page 2 (last sentence of the first paragraph) suggests that the effect of social support decreases, but I think you are suggesting that it's actually that they are not accessing social support and if they did the effect would still hold. Please clarify this point. Similarly, on p. 13 (first complete sentence) says that worsening social support is part of the link between torture and PTSD, but be careful about indicating this is somehow captured as a change score. It should be more clearly stated as lower social support rather than worsening social support.

A few minor points for clarification/modification:

The paper identifies that all participants have permanent residency. It would be useful somewhere in the paper to highlight that this population is unique to those still awaiting their asylum claims to be processed. It would help to situate this within the broader context of refugee flight in Europe.

In the measures section, please provide directions for interpreting the measures (e.g., higher scores = more pathology?)

Table 1 seems incomplete. It is hard to interpret the Chi-square findings without knowing the data from the non-respondents.

It would improve consistency in the paper to change the ordering of the Aims/Results so they are congruent (e.g., Aim 3 is reported first in the results)

The limitations section should recognise that the 6 item single dimensional measure of social support may be missing details on aspects of social support. This study doesn't seem to have captured any data on the size of a person's social network, the location of support (e.g., are they still accessing supports overseas?), the type of support (e.g., might instrumental versus emotional support play different roles for men and women?). Some recognition of the limits of the ESSI is warranted.

It would be useful to have a final paragraph on final conclusions and recommendations for future research. The implications of the findings, such as policy recommendations to increase social connectivity of refugee populations, would be a useful addition.

There are a few minor typographical errors (e.g., casual instead of causal)

The paper draws on a large sample of Syrians in Sweden with permanent residency. There are interesting findings that could be further strengthened by clarifying key points about the approach and findings described above.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

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