Reviewer's report

Title: Mental, neurological, and substance use problems among refugees in primary health care: analysis of the Health Information System in 90 refugee camps

Version: 1 Date: 2 October 2014

Reviewer: Matthew Friedman

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Major Compulsory Revisions:

This is a well-written report on a very valuable data base collected between 2009-2013 on neuropsychiatric disorders among refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The report presents differences in primary care visits for different disorders as well as differences by nation, age and gender. All of this will be of great interest to readers.

I recognize that acquiring such a massive data set is a major undertaking for which the authors are to be congratulated. I believe that the paper could be strengthened in two ways.

1. There is no good discussion of the rationale for the case definition categories shown in Table 1. “Severe emotional disorder,” for example, appears to encompass mood, anxiety & trauma-related disorders. Furthermore “other psychological complaint” might or might not encompass some DSM/ICD psychiatric diagnoses. I think that readers want to know why a more recognizable diagnostic classification was not utilized. I am not, necessarily, criticizing the scheme that was adopted but stating that more attention needs to be devoted to explaining the rationale and limitations of this approach.

2. Because of the classification scheme that was adopted, there is no way to interpret the current findings within the diagnostic context mentioned in Introduction (where most of the literature is about PTSD and depression among refugee and IDP populations). Epilepsy is another example. Given the distinction between “fits” (seizures) and “spells” (non-organic seizures) and the finding that the latter are often preceded by a traumatic event, it would be useful to address this issue. Again, there are inherent limitations to the potential granularity of archival data. They should be acknowledged and discussed in the paper.

Minor Essential Revisions: None
Discretionary Revisions: None

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.