Reviewer’s report

Title: Gender differences among Indigenous Canadians experiencing Homelessness and Mental Illness

Version: 1 Date: 31 Jan 2019

Reviewer: Reviewer 2

Reviewer's report:

PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS:

OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses a testable research question(s) (brief or other article types: is there a clear objective)?
Yes - there is a clear objective

DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?
Yes - the approach is appropriate

EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?
Yes - experiments and analyses were performed appropriately

Statistics - Is the use of statistics in the manuscript appropriate?
Yes - appropriate statistical analyses have been used in the study

INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?
No - there are minor issues

OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Is the current version of this work technically sound? If not, can revisions be made to make the work technically sound?
Yes - current version is technically sound

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS:

GENERAL COMMENTS: This study explores an important topic with a high amount of relevance to the field of homelessness and mental health. The study appears to have been well-executed and has a strong, rigorous design with good power. The research questions are solid and clear. The manuscript is well written, concise and appropriately structured. I especially appreciate the critical focus of the article. Overall, I think this is an very good article on an important topic and that it should have no trouble getting published in a reputable peer-reviewed journal. The article has some limitations. First, the findings on gender differences and their direction are important, they are not surprising and a
comparison between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous women would offer better clarity on policy and practice implications. The authors also over-reach a bit in the discussion and they also need to do a better job identifying more specific practice and policy implications for their findings. I expand on these areas in the next section.

REQUESTED REVISIONS:
First, the findings are not terribly new. For instance, it is not surprising that the authors found gender differences between homeless Indigenous women and men on social and psychological factors examined (i.e. trauma, violence etc) in the direction they found. What would have been more interesting is whether the experiences of homeless Indigenous women are more severe than homeless women who are not Indigenous. Comparing these data to homeless data for women in general could add more relevance to the findings.

Second, while I appreciate the critical approach to the article in regards to colonialism and neo colonialism, I think that some of the authors claims in the discussion are a bit of an over-reach when they attribute the differences they find unequivocally to these factors without proper evidence. The study did not seek out to answer this question and it is an assumption (probably a good one) that the difference in outcome was attribute to this phenomenon. The language of causation needs to be adjusted here or other potential causes need to be considered as possibilities.

Here are two examples from the opening paragraph in the discussion section: (1) "The results of this study are consistent with the hypothesis that Indigenous women who become homeless are markedly afflicted by the legacy of colonization as manifested by violent victimization, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidality.", and (2), "These findings support the interpretation that Indigenous women continue to experience forms of violence, social exclusion, and marginalization and that these experiences are consequences of colonizing practices that sought to extinguish Indigenous women's historic roles as matriarchs and custodians of cultural continuity."

Again, I don't disagree with these claims and they should be mentioned in the paper as possibilities. However, there is no evidence from this study that directly supports these claims. I suggest that the authors adjust the language to discuss this as a possibility, among other policy or social factors. Doing so will strengthen their argument.

Third, the suicide data is profoundly important and should be featured more prominently with specific policy and program recommendations. Furthermore, while I like how the authors have structured their discussion, the discussion could benefit from more specific and detailed considerations on practice approaches, programs or outcomes to address all of the findings. In short, be more specific in this area. Saying there is a need for "trauma informed care" is true, but not enough. What specific forms or policies need to be designed and implemented to address this issue? What suicide, trauma, housing and rehabilitation interventions for clinicians and programs are needed? What do existing housing-first programs need to do better? What do outreach workers and clinicians need to know? Who should they be? Identifying evidence-based or promising interventions that have been studied and shown to improve outcomes need to be identified.

Lastly, a better transition to the methods is needed that identified research questions and give the reader a snapshot of the study.

ADDITIONAL REQUESTS/SUGGESTIONS:
I have identified these in my previous comments
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.

No

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 am able to assess the statistics

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

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