Reviewer's report

Title: Long-term follow-up of residual symptoms in patients treated for stress-related exhaustion

Version: 0 Date: 05 Nov 2019

Reviewer: Sarah Allen

Reviewer's report:

Long-term follow-up of residual symptoms in patients treated for stress-related exhaustion.

This paper describes some findings from a long-term follow up of a cohort of patients previously treated for exhaustion disorder. In my opinion, while the study appears well-conducted, the paper requires work particularly in terms of its scientific writing style before it can be considered further for publication.

The paper contains many grammatical errors and spelling mistakes throughout. This includes a lack of consistency in use of tenses, and many missing or incorrect words and letters. I would recommend the authors proofread the manuscript thoroughly.

Abstract

Methods could be more specific, please provide more details including study setting and timing of follow-ups. Proofread.

Background

You state patients seeking care for exhaustion have been described elsewhere, however a brief description of these patients (i.e. their characteristics, symptoms etc) included in the background would be beneficial for the reader.

Could you please include the cut-off for clinical burnout using the SMBQ (page 5, line 2).

Please include some explanation and description of what treatments are currently used for treating exhaustion.

Please explain the characteristics of the subgroup identified by Hatinen et al., as it is unclear what you mean here.
The aims of the study are very vague. Could you state more defined objectives in terms of the associations you are trying to explore, and also why a seven year follow-up period was chosen.

You state at the beginning of your method you wish to explore plausible predictors for long lasting exhaustion and sex differences in residual symptoms, yet discussion of either predictors or sex differences are not included in the background.

Method

Please provided details of ethical approval and how informed consent was sought at baseline and at the specific follow-up stage.

Although you state that the description of the treatment is described elsewhere, brief details would be useful to include. This would provide some clarification as to whether all patients received the same treatment and level of care, as well as the length of time they received treatment.

Study procedures - For clarity try to differentiate between previous follow-ups and the current 7 year follow up, particularly when describing which questionnaires were completed and how/where they were administered. This is currently rather confusing.

Please clarify what is meant by 'We have previously published symptom development measured during treatment' and provide details.

Measurements - This first section is very hard to follow. I would recommend either rewriting the section more clearly or presenting the information in a table to clearly describe each variable and how it was measured or scored, including indication of whether it was continuous or categorical.

Statistics - Please be more specific when explaining which variables were involved in each analysis. This will be aided by my previous suggestion to clarify the nature of each variable. Specifying the predictors and outcomes in the regression analyses would also be beneficial for the readers understanding.

Results

Provide descriptive subtitle for first two paragraphs. Also consider presenting these results in a table as this section is quite hard to follow.

Please clarify what you mean by 'mental symptoms' (page 9, line 4).

Both tables require legends to explain bold text and statistical notations.
Discussion

Please discuss results in terms of each aim of the study.

Does this subgroup of patients not simply refer to those for whom treatment has been unsuccessful? Hence this is why they have not recovered over time. If so, perhaps include some discussion of how and why the treatment may have been unsuccessful.

A lot of interpretation of your findings appears to be based on assumptions and there is a lack of referencing of evidence to back up these assertions.

Could you consider examining individual characteristics of patients in future work to develop a risk profile for this sub-group.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

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 am able to assess the statistics

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

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
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