Reviewer’s report

Title: Publication and non-publication of clinical trials in PTSD: an overview

Version: 0 Date: 04 Dec 2018

Reviewer: Jigisha Patel

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript reports findings which are not novel, but are important. I think that, in its current state, the purpose of the study and implications of its findings are unclear. The way it is presented is confusing. It could be improved by some clarification and a more focused approach.

Major essential revisions.

1. It would help to be more explicit about the purpose of this study.
   a. What was the question the authors were attempting to answer and did they have a hypothesis?
   b. What were the intended outcome measures of this study?

I seems the outcomes were, what proportion of registered studies go on to be published and how long does this take, but this is unclear (see my later comments).

2. In the methods section, be clearer about the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The authors seem to contradict themselves by saying any PTSD study was concluded, but then saying qualitative studies, reviews, case reports letters to the editor were excluded. Did they have predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria or was this decided post hoc?

3. In the methods section the authors include study outcome as part of the information they extracted from the trial register. They later say that information extracted from published trial data included whether manuscripts reported results related to studies reported in the registry. This is important information. Whether or not the outcomes reported in the registry entry for a given trial are reported as outcomes in the published article gives an indication of reporting bias. This seems pertinent to this study. I cannot find reference to this in the results section. I recommend the authors include this (eg the proportion of studies where the stated primary outcome was reported as the primary outcome in the subsequent publication) and comment on whether or not they found evidence of reporting bias. Alternatively the authors could comment on the lack of this data as a limitation.
I note that outcomes are reported in table 2, but the focus of that table seems to be a comparison of interventional and observational studies rather than the outcomes stated in the trial registry compared with the outcomes stated in the corresponding published article.

4. On Pages 5 and 6 can the authors refer to PTSD as an outcome. My understanding is that PTSD is a diagnosis. I am assuming the authors didn't just look at trials where the diagnosis of PTSD was an outcome. Can they better define the different PTSD related outcomes that were included?

5. The results section is organised into information about interventional studies and information about observational studies. Tables 1 and 2 provide data separated out into interventional and observational studies with the results of comparative statistical analysis. However, earlier the authors stated that they excluded observational studies from further analysis because there represented only a small proportion of studies found and because registration of these is voluntary. Why have the authors chosen to do a comparative analysis between interventional and observational studies and give this such prominence in the results section given their earlier statement? Was this comparison part of the original aims of the study (if so way?) or were these findings included post hoc because the statistical analysis yielded some statistically significant p values?

Minor essential revisions

The results section could be shortened to improve clarity. On page 7, for example, much of the data is already presented in the table 1 and does not need to re-iterated in the results section text unless it is particularly pertinent to the aim of the study. Can the authors consider shortening the results section to remove repetition of results that are already in tables to help the reader focus in on the most important results?

Note: I am not qualified to comment on whether appropriate statistical analyses were used.

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