



Letter to the editor: Selection bias not discussed concerning the article “PTSD of rape after IS (Islamic State) captivity” by J. I. Kizilhan, published in: *Archives of Women’s Mental Health* 2018 Oct; 21(5):517–524. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-018-0824-3>. Epub 2018 Mar 10

Pia Jäger^{1,2}

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Kizilhan describes in his article “PTSD of rape after IS (“Islamic State”) captivity” the prevalence of PTSD as well as comorbidities of other psychological disorders in Yazidi women after having been raped in ISIS captivity.

In this survey, the author found a high prevalence of PTSD and other mental disorders two years after the captivity and rape in the examined women. Thus, a somatoform disorder was detected in 67%, depression in 53%, PTSD (fulfilling DSM-IV criteria) 49%, and anxiety in 39%. Further, the number of rape events, pregnancy caused by rape, body pain, or family member still in IS captivity could have been made out as being risk factors for developing a PTSD.

In this study, however, it should be noted that there may not be a sufficiently discussed selection bias.

As inclusion criteria for participating, Kizilhan describes that the Yazidi women from the area of Sinjar in Northern Iraq were victims of rape and held in captivity for at least three months by the so-called “Islamic State” (IS) in Iraq and Syria. They have come to Germany between six and eight months after their captivity.

It can be assumed that all these women are participants of the German Special Quota Program “Sonderkontingent Baden-Württemberg (SK BaWü) - Vulnerable Women and Children from Northern Iraq” (Hillebrecht et al. 2018) that

brought in 2015 1100 female Yazidi to Germany to give them security and psychological treatment.

An aspect that is not mentioned in the article is that the presence of symptoms of a mental disorder has been the requirement for participating in this program. In several German-language interviews, Kizilhan describes the admission process; for that, he performed himself a “psychological screening” with the affected women in Northern Iraq (e.g., Dehmer 2016). Since the places of the Special Quota project were limited, it was useful to select women who were particularly affected by mental symptoms and who were at risk of developing a mental disorder. Thus, he tells in an interview of the “Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung in Germany: [translated] “More than 90 percent met the criteria of post-traumatic stress disorder and needed treatment. That was one of the reasons why we choose them.” (Grachtrup 2018).

Also, in the recent scientific publication of other authors working at this project, the “special treatment need” is described as the main inclusion criterion (Hillebrecht et al. 2018).

This aspect is not mentioned in the article, neither in the methods nor in the limitations.

Regardless of the humanitarian meaningfulness of this approach, there might be a strong selection bias in the sample with a possible over-detection of mental disorders. The naming of these limitations is indispensable in indicating the prevalence of mental disorders among the women examined.

✉ Pia Jäger
pia.jaeger@rub.de

¹ Social Policy and Social Economy Section, Faculty of Social Science, Ruhr-University Bochum, Universitätsstr. 150, 44801 Bochum, Germany

² Department of International Health, Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Maastricht University, P.O. Box 616, 6200 MD Maastricht, Netherlands

Compliance with ethical standards

This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author. The author declares that this manuscript complies with the ethical rules applicable for this journal.

Conflict of interest The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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