contrasting these minimal changes with the significant improvement in the exposure-treated group, we find it appropriate to conclude that exposure therapy given alone seems to be more beneficial in the long term. Longer follow-up could have added valuable information to this issue. In all groups about 20% of the patients were treated with sertraline during the follow-up period so this could not explain the differences in scores between the groups at week 52.

Declaration of interest

Funding was provided by Pfizer, Inc.

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Premature conclusions about depression prevention programmes

In my opinion, the meta-analysis by Jané-Llopis *et al* (2003) suffers from some methodological flaws that misguided the authors to draw premature conclusions on predictors of prevention in depression prevention programmes.

First, many of the selected studies did not target the prevention of depression but examined therapeutic or preventive strategies for other primary disorders and used depression scores as secondary outcome measures. For example, Bisson *et al* (1997) studied the efficacy of psychological debriefing on the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in victims of acute burn traumas. They showed that psychological debriefing may even worsen the long-term course of burn victims. But while psychological debriefing may have been mistakenly considered helpful for preventing PTSD in the past, no reasonable therapist or researcher has ever claimed that massive emotional confrontation would represent a promising strategy for depression or depression prevention.

Second, the coding of respective methods looks rather inconsistent, and I wonder how the authors were able to reach such a high interrater reliability across codes. For example, the psychological debriefing method used by Bisson *et al* (1997) was coded as 'behavioural, cognitive and educational' (p. 389), while the code 'cognitive' was missing for Seligman *et al*'s (1999) intervention based on cognitive therapy. Similarly, four research groups using similar variants of the *Coping with Depression Course* by Lewinsohn *et al* (1984) were coded differently (e.g. 'cognitive and competence', 'behavioural, cognitive, educational and social support', 'cognitive', and 'behavioural, cognitive, competence and educational' (pp. 386–391)). Finally, the coding category 'behavioural methods' incorporates very heterogeneous strategies. For example, behavioural strategies found to be helpful in cognitive–behavioural therapy for depression focus on increasing pleasant activities and social skills training (Lewinsohn *et al*, 1984), whereas the delivery of peer support telephone dyads by lay persons, as used in the studies by Heller *et al* (1991), may be regarded as a very specific behavioural strategy which has so far not been recommended as a helpful intervention by the research community. In Jané-Llopis *et al*'s meta-analysis, respective interventions from the studies by Heller *et al* (1991) had negative effect sizes and therefore may have substantially accounted for the missing or even negative effect of the 'behavioural' component of preventive measures.

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Lewinsohn, P. M., Antonuccio, D. O., Steinmetz, J. L., *et al* (1984) *The Coping with Depression Course. A Psychoeducational Intervention for Unipolar Depression.* Eugene, OR: Castalia Publishing Company.

Seligman, M. E. P., Schulman, P., DeRubeis, R. J., *et al* (1999) The prevention of depression and anxiety. *Prevention & Treatment*, **2**, article 8.

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Homicide data

I am writing to query the homicide statistics quoted by Dr Salib (2003). The figures he quotes for total annual homicides suggest a fall in homicide between 1979 and 2001. The source for his figures is quoted as the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Homicide statistics are easily available through the website of the ONS and from various other sources, including Home Office statistical bulletins and the House of Commons Library. For example, Richards (1999) describes homicide trends between 1945 and 1997, demonstrating the dramatic rise in rates of offences initially recorded as homicide seen over that time from around 300 or 400 a year in the 1950s to more than 700 a year in the late 1990s. The recent Home Office Statistical Bulletin (Simmons & Dodd, 2003) shows a continuing rise in this trend with 1048 deaths initially attributed to homicide in 2002/2003, although these figures are based on date of notification and thus can include deaths that actually took place in earlier years.

Dr Salib's paper appears to use data on death registrations from the ONS where there has been a conviction for murder or for manslaughter. However, the ONS assigns a temporary ICD–9 code for cause of death for deaths where death was violent, unnatural or suspicious or pending the outcome of inquests and legal proceedings, which are of course often prolonged. The ONS site itself states that it is difficult to present accurate statistics on number of homicides using death registrations, which is what Dr Salib has seemingly attempted to do.

As psychiatry is faced with a Government currently determined to medicalise as far as possible the growing problem of violence in our society, it is essential that psychiatric journals present statistics on this subject in a meaningful fashion. Dr Salib's paper, although not specifically about trends in homicide over time, presents misleading data on this subject, which are neither helpful nor informative to the wider debate on violence in society.

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Simmons, J. & Dodd, T. (2003) *Crime in England and Wales, 2002/2003* (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1358-510X, 07/03). London: Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate.

Salib, E. O. (2003) Effect of 11 September 2001 on suicide and homicide in England and Wales. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **183**, 207–212.

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Author's reply: Dr Rowlands raises an important question, triggered by homicide data in my recent paper on the effect of

https://doi.org/10.1192/S0007125000077552 Published online by Cambridge University Press

September 11 on suicide and homicide in England and Wales. He argues that when tackling violence in our society, the current Government may plan services on the basis of information that is misleading and flawed.

The data used in my paper – in excess of 130 000 unnatural deaths (E950–959 and E980–989, excluding E988.8) – were obtained from the ONS in 2002 then updated in 2003; 7400 of these deaths were classed by the ONS as manslaughter and unlawful killing (homicide; ICD–9 E969).

It was clearly pointed out in my paper that routinely collected data was a major limitation of the study, but I had to accept the nationally collected data from ONS as reliable and as complete as possible. It should be pointed out that before 1993, ONS data were based on year of registration of death but the data that were actually used in the analysis relating to September 11 related to the year when suicide and homicide occurred.

The paper made no reference whatsoever, implicitly or explicitly, to homicide trends in England and Wales since 1979. The only comment about trends in homicide was made in relation to seasonal variations to show that the reduction in homicide noted after August was not related to the events of September 11 but merely represented some seasonal pattern. The higher homicide figures that Dr Rowlands quoted may have been, as he rightly pointed out, the result of notification of deaths that actually occurred in earlier years.

Dr Rowlands has used the paper to make a political point about 'a Government currently determined to medicalise violence'. I fail to see the relevance of his otherwise valid comment to this paper, the first and so far the only available literature on the effect of September 11 on suicide and homicide in countries other than the USA.

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Mental health and psychiatric research in Brazil

Saxena *et al* (2003) have shown the under-representation of low and middle-income countries on the editorial boards of ten leading psychiatric journals, based on a World Health Organization report. Horton (2003), Editor of *The Lancet*, has presented some evidence of publication bias against diseases of poverty studied in developing countries. Wilkinson (2003), formerly Editor of the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, has suggested that the absence of representation on the Editorial Board does not necessarily bias an editor's decision-making. However, Catapano & Castle (2003) have shown that research papers from developing countries represent a very small proportion of the publications (<2%) in important psychiatric journals, which has remained the same for 10 years. We argue that Brazil, a middle-income country, is progressively improving its scientific production and reaching the standards of high-income countries.

We have assessed the mental health scientific production of Brazilian postgraduate programmes between 1998 and 2002 using a Brazilian Ministry of Education database. The eight doctoral programmes in psychiatry and psychobiology, all in state institutions, have awarded 183 PhDs and this has resulted in publication of 1664 scientific articles in journals; 605 of these in journals indexed by the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI). The production of ISI-indexed papers doubled in this 5-year-period. The mean impact factor of the ISI-indexed journals where articles were published was 1.82 (range 0.01–29.51); 64% were published in journals with an impact factor >1. The number of Brazilian articles in psychiatry and psychology (442) published between 1998 and 2003 corresponds to 10% of France's (4129) production, but the impact factors are very similar: 4.48 and 4.83, respectively (data from ISI, reported on http://in-cities.com/countries).

Although health problems in developing countries account for over 90% of the world's potential life-years lost, only 5% of global health research funds are devoted to these problems (Mari *et al*, 1997). The investment channelled to postgraduate and human resource educational programmes in Brazil has assured the country a modest but continuous contribution to the worldwide production of knowledge in health. It is expected that the quality of the scientific production of countries such as Brazil will influence editors' decision-making and overcome eventual 'institutional racism' (Horton, 2003).

Declaration of interest

J.J.M. and E.C.M. are Editors and R.A.B. is an Associate editor of *Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria*.

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One hundred years ago

The attitude of the legal profession towards the medical profession

IN a letter published in THE LANCET of Feb. 27th, p. 611, Dr. E. MAGENNIS, writing of the conduct of barristers in Ireland, deplored the disappearance of that courteous treatment of the medical witness which once characterised cross-examination but which at the same time did not prevent the most vigorous investigation of the facts, and he drew attention to the unwarranted impertinence, frequently amounting to positive insult, which appears to arise from the assumption that the medical witness must not only be prejudiced but ready to give perjured evidence on behalf of the party employing him. There are many who agree with Dr. MAGENNIS, and who will add that the discourteous treatment of the medical witness is not altogether

https://doi.org/10.1192/S0007125000077552 Published online by Cambridge University Press