Reviewer’s report

Title: Patients presenting with somatic complaints in general practice: depression, anxiety and somatoform disorders are frequent and associated to psychosocial stressors

Version: 3 Date: 18 July 2010

Reviewer: Kurt Kroenke

Reviewer’s report:

While the relationship between somatic, depressive, and anxiety symptoms is well-established, the relationship between all 3 types of symptoms and psychosocial stressors has been less well-studied. Therefore, this paper is a useful contribution to the literature. Strengths include the multi-center nature of the study (21 practices), the enrollment from primary care (where patients with physical complaints typically present), the large sample size (n=917), a good sampling strategy to minimize selection bias, and the use of well-validated measures.

Suggested Revisions

1. P. 5. The authors state: “… there have been few studies conducted regarding the possible association of mental disorders in patients presenting with physical symptoms in primary care and psychosocial stressors.” They cite 2 studies but another they should cite is: Poleshuck E, et al. Psychosocial stress and anxiety in musculoskeletal pain patients with and without depression. Gen Hosp Psychiatry. 2009;31:116-122.

2. Several statements should be made clearer:
   a. P. 7, line 2, it is stated: “The response scales were closed…” What does “closed” mean?
   b. P. 7, 2nd paragraph, it is stated: “Each GP held a patient log file, which was not transmitted to the data collection centre.” What is a “patient log file”, and why was it not transmitted to the data collection centre?

3. Figures 1 and 2 are both very important figures and a nice contribution to the literature. However, two things are recommended for Figure 1:
   a. The “fill pattern” for each of the 3 inner overlapping circles representing depression, anxiety, and somatoform disorders is covering part of the lines for each circle. It would be better for the lines to show through (e.g., if Powerpoint is used, one can use the “transparent” feature) so that the reader can see the degree of overlap
   b. A similar figure representing a different data set that has been published. It would be useful to refer to this other paper in the Discussion, and how the author’s figure is similar or different in terms of prevalence and overlap of the 3

4. P. 9, it is stated: “We observed an increased prevalence of mental disorder along with a higher level of intensity for each psychosocial stressor addressed in the PHQ.” Figure 2 shows an increased prevalence of mental disorder for each psychosocial stressor. However, what is meant by “a higher level of intensity”, and where is this data shown?

5. The Statistical Analysis and Results sections indicate that odds ratios for stressors are adjusted for education in addition to age and gender, but the column heading for Table 2 indicates adjustment for only age and gender. Which is correct?

6. P. 9, it is stated: “Furthermore, each major psychosocial stressor increased the association to mental disorders by 2.2 times (95% CI = 2.0 to 2.5). The likelihood-ratio test shows that the cumulating effect of a psychosocial stressor can be assumed to be linear (p=0.547). Compared to those without any of these stressors, we observed that the odds of being anxious or depressive increased from 3.1 for those exposed to one stressor, to over 50 for those exposed to five or more stressor.” I have several questions:

a. What type of analysis was done to calculate the odds ratios above? For example, describe the model that resulted in the odds of 2.2. Was the presence of any of the 3 mental disorders the dependent variable, and the number of stressors the independent variable, using a logistic regression model and controlling for confounders?

b. If the first model used any mental disorder (6.a. above), then how did one model the odds of 3.1 and 50, since now the authors are stating “being anxious or depressive”. Were somatoform disorders excluded in these models.

c. In short, a more detailed description of the models that produced this data above is needed.

7. P. 10, it is stated: “The prevalence of mental disorders increased with the subjective perception of higher intensity exposure to these stressors.” What is meant by this? Are the authors referring to the fact they only counted stressors if they were endorsed as “bothered a lot”? Or do they mean they examined different intensity of exposures? This needs to be clarified.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests