Reviewer's report

Title: Diagnostic utility of a one-item question to screen for depressive disorders: results from the MONICA/KORA study

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Reviewer: Panagiotis Simos

Reviewer's report:

The major strength of this manuscript is the large scale of the sample (over 3000 persons), although the capacity to generalize to the population as a whole is somewhat limited given that the data come from Bavaria only.

The main research question addressed is clear and sound (can a single-item screen for depression be clinically useful in primary practice?).

An important methodological limitation, however, is that the validity of the screen is assessed against estimates of the presence of mere depressive symptoms or major depression derived from a short (9-item) self-report questionnaire, which in itself has moderate sensitivity and specificity (~.88 in both cases). The authors rightly acknowledge in the Discussion that the specificity of the one-item screener may drop to as low as 66% when the criterion is clinically-assessed depression. Paired with it’s low sensitivity (46% in the present study), it would mean that the response to a single question regarding presence of sad/depressed mood performs at near-chance levels.

Analyses are appropriate for the research question addressed. In addition to statistical indices of concurrent validity, however, I would like to see two 2x2 tables crosstabulating the numbers of participants who were screened positive and negative for (a) depressive mood and (b) major depression against those who replied “yes” and “no” on the single-item screener.

In view of these serious limitations, which are only in part addressed in the Discussion, the results do not support the validity of the one-item instrument in non-psychiatric practice.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests