Reviewer’s report

Title: Assessing medically unexplained symptoms: Evaluation of a shortened version of the SOMS for use in primary care

Version: 1  Date: 3 January 2010

Reviewer: Jose Pais Ribeiro

Reviewer’s report:

- Accept after minor essential revisions

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The objective of the study is clear

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
minor essential revisions

In the “Subjects and data collection” the number of participants is not described. The numbers are only presented in the results section, on page 7, but not the total number yet. In page 8 they say 167 participants (and table 1): are these numbers total participants numbers? It seems appropriate to present the number of participants on the Subjects and data collection section

What type of sample is this one? Is it a sequential sample? It seems appropriate to describe the type of sample and how and why non participants are excluded or do not participate

The SOMS present “42 symptoms for men; 45 for women” in page 2 and “a list of 47 somatoform symptoms for men and women, 5 symptoms only for women and 1 symptom only for men are described” in page 4, which they explain in page 5. It seems more appropriate to leave the presentation of the number of symptoms only in page 4 and 5 instead of in page 2, in the measures section

How did the authors translate the questions? Usually direct translation from English to Portuguese needs to be discussed for linguistic and cultural equivalence. Are symptoms culturally appropriate (Rief and Rojas -2007- alert for cultural differences) How did authors carry out this part? (Original version-reference 22- do not comment this part, or comment briefly).

How are the answers categorized? Is it yes or no? If so how did they assess Cronbach alpha? (if so do they use dummy variables?). Hiller and Janca, 2003 study report internal consistency or reliability but not Cronbach alpha.

Rief and Hiller (2003) change answer procedure “To improve the sensitivity to change, the answer categories were modified from dichotomy to a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very severe)”, and then they talk about
alpha. But the authors do not refer this study. How did the authors classify each item in the present study?

3. Are the data sound?
Data are sound but sometimes they are not clear. Namely it is not clear how they get Cronbach alphas or some other correlations when they are based on each item.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
It is ok

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
It seems to appropriately supported by the data

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Authors report limitations to the study related with the sample but not with the SOMS-2 which seems to be the central part of the study

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
It seems appropriate to consider the Winfried Rief, and Wolfgang Hiller, study (Psychosomatics 44:492-498, December 2003)

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The abstract seems to be ok

9. Is the writing acceptable?
I am not a native speaker and I am conscious that my proficiency in English is not one of an educated native speaker. However in technical grounds it seems acceptable.

Other comments
More minor essential revisions
The acronyms are not always connected with the full name: for example Screening for Somatoform Disorders (SOMS) as Hiller and Janca 2003 report it never appears.

It is not the only one. We recommend a review of the acronyms. Some of them appear in the abstract only and it seems appropriate to include them in the text.

'I declare that I have no competing interests'
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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'