Reviewer's report

Title: Perception of depressive symptoms by the Sardinian public: Results of a population study

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Reviewer: Gioia Mura

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Perception of depressive symptoms by the Sardinian public: Results of a population study by Carta et al, BMC Psychiatry

The paper deals with a really interesting and currently in debate field: the distance between the medical/psychiatric definition and concept of depression and the public’s perception of a depressive episode. The results confirm the findings of a previous study carried out in Vienna that has fund the public tends to perceive depressive symptoms differently depending on the context in which they occur. This lets authors to conclude that the divide between the public’s view of what depression is and the view of DSM-IV is not limited to a particular culture but seems to represent a more general phenomenon. In consequence, authors suggest rethinking the diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder in order to reconcile both views. The pattern of Sardinian people who rely on self-help or support by family members or close friends is debated, taking into account some cultural specificity, and the argument seems reasonable.

In general the paper is well organized, reasoned and balanced.
References are quite appropriate.

I have only some minor points to suggest for improve the paper:

1) The method of randomization and saturation by quotes would be better underlined and descript.

2) The comparison between the Sardinian and Vienna’s results may be reported in the results section (with statistical differences), and it could be illustrated by adjunctive tables

3) The debate on the field has recently enhanced by the paper of M. Maj (Maj M. Differentiating depression from ordinary sadness: contextual, qualitative and pragmatic approaches, World Psychiatry 11:S1:42-47,2012). Some contributes of this work may improve the discussion, particularly when Maj, discussing the results of the Vienna study that has been replicated by the present study, says that “It appears, therefore, urgent to articulate a convincing response”. He introduces by consequence three different potential diagnostic approaches pointing out that the issue is critical “for the development of the ICD-11 classification of mental disorders”.

4) The distance between medical and public point of view introduces another
interesting issue: the years around the millennium end have been signed, in Europe and Western countries, with a real crusade in the media about the social burden of mood disorders and the need that the public had to know the psychiatric point of view because of the supposed unmet needs of treatments for depression in the community. Do the findings of the study suggest the total failure of this crusade? The author may touch this point in the debate.

5) Another interesting point overlooked in the discussion, directly related to the precedent, is the discrepancy between the percentage of people who perceive a situation as "non-psychiatric condition" and the one that suggests, for the same situation, professional help. It seems that, despite people are reluctant to label a condition resulting from a stressful life event as a psychiatric disorder, though often deemed necessary a specialist support. While the reluctance can be related to Sardinians’ cultural characteristics, may the suggestion of seek professional help derived from a people’s new point of view concerning Psychiatry? On this issue, it might be interesting to see the stratification of responses by gender and age, and how people with a history of direct or indirect psychiatric contacts address to the problem compared with people without previous psychiatric contact.

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.