Reviewer's report

Title: Psychological treatment of depression: A meta-analytic database of randomized studies

Version: 2 Date: 14 February 2008

Reviewer: Rafael Perera

Reviewer's report:

Manuscript: Psychological treatment of depression: A meta-analytic database of randomized studies

Statistical review

The manuscript discusses the proposal to publish (online?) and maintain a new database of randomised controlled studies of psychological interventions for the treatment of depression. The authors mention that most of these trials have been included in published meta-analyses (systematic reviews?) on the subject. The database will hold relevant data on these trials that would facilitate research in this area to anyone interested.

The format of the database and the description of it is adequate and user friendly; the inclusion criteria is also adequately described and is consistent with the high quality data used in systematic reviews of randomised controlled trials of therapeutic interventions.

This proposal seems to me a very good idea. However, I believe there would be relevant information that should be included in the database that would aid researchers in the area.

Major Compulsory Revisions

â¢ There is no information about the follow-up time for these studies. The closest to this is the number of sessions in the interventions. It is important to know the follow-up time (time from baseline to collection of outcome)

â¢ The effect size d reported is a point estimate. This needs to be reported with some measure of precision; either a confidence interval around d or a SE for the effect size reported. Without a measure of precision pooled meta-analyses will not be feasible using this database.

â¢ It would be very useful to have the original data reported (in the original scale) as well as the effect size d. This is because researchers could be interested in specific scales and knowing the variability of such scales; for example for the sample size calculation of further studies where these data would be invaluable.

â¢ On a related issue, average effects for all the outcomes in the study could potentially skew the data if one large effect is found in one outcome. Having the original data would allow the users of the database to identify if this is happening.

Minor Essential Revisions
Although it is not explicitly mentioned the suggestion is that it would be free to all researchers (this might need to be made explicit).

There is no mention as to where this database will be located, which software will be required to access it or how regularly they plan to update it; all issues that would be important to know beforehand.

Discretionary Revisions

Although in the present database each arm in a trial is labelled using the intervention used, there is no definition of what these interventions represent. It would be very useful to have a link to another table (relational database) with the description of the different interventions and what these involve.

The authors use a summary outcome of effect (Cohen’s d). This is equal to the effect reported or the average of the effects reported in each RCT. Is there are reason for their choice of Cohen’s d instead of Hedges g which takes into account sample size for their calculation?

The effect size reported does not indicate if this was done using any adjustments (within each trial) or if it was obtained in an un-adjusted analysis. This is not very problematic as we are dealing with RCTs in which adjustments are uncommon and when they are done they are unlikely to provide significant differences. However, it is possible that adjusted effect sizes are being reported and it would be good to know if this is the case.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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