Reviewer's report

Title: Epidemiologic heterogeneity of common mood and anxiety disorders over the lifecourse in the general population: a systematic review

Version: 1 Date: 22 January 2009

Reviewer: Morten Hesse

Reviewer's report:

This is a comprehensive review that asks two important and related problems: what (sub)types of psychiatric disorders exist, and what are the trajectories of patients with psychiatric symptoms.

Major Compulsory Revisions

The authors consistently refer to studies as having "identified" sub-types and specific trajectories. However, the statistical approach that each study has used is not even reported. For this reason, the authors seem to assume that all strategies for 'identifying' sub-types or trajectories are equally valid. However, this may not be the case, and a discussion of appropriate or less appropriate strategies to resolve these questions in individual studies should be included - even if all these studies used state-of-the-art approaches to analyse their data.

Also, in terms of the individual study, no information is given regarding the type of data that was collected, the psychometric quality of the data collection procedure, the response rate, or other methodological features that may have a bearing on the validity of the findings.

Finally, in terms of this being a systematic review, there is little systematic integration of the data. For instance, do studies agree in terms of the number and types of subtypes or trajectories for single disorders (i.e., where more than one study could be included)? If so, do they agree in terms of the prevalence of each sub-type? And, upon closer inspection, if they do agree about the label of sub-types or trajectories, do they also agree on the definition of sub-types. And vice-versa, authors may disagree on labels but their findings may be highly similar in fact.

Also, the authors do not distinguish clearly between pre-defined sub-types and empirically derived sub-types.

In summary, the manuscript is more of a commentary-type review than a systematic review.

Minor essential revisions

The authors state in the methods section that the studies should use DSM-IV in their assessment. Several studies are reported to have collected their data prior
to the publication of the DSM-IV. If they have had access to the DSM-IV in draft versions and have in fact utilized the DSM-IV prior to its publication, this should be explained. If not, they should be excluded from the tables and analyses.

The tables appear more as a separate section than as tables. In order to provide an overview, the tables should be reworked to include less text, and the essential information from the text should be included in the text (where it is not already present).

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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.