Reviewer's report

Title: Validation of the Finnish Version of the SCOFF Questionnaire among Young Adults Aged 20 to 35 Years.

Version: 3  Date: 5 November 2008

Reviewer: Jonathan Mond

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The authors have done a good job of addressing the major concerns raised. I have the following remaining concerns:

1) The Introduction still does not make it clear why this study is important – i.e. if detecting eating disorders in primary care is important but difficult, and if the SCOFF was designed to be a simple, memorable screening instrument for use in primary care, how then will elucidating the psychometric properties of the SCOFF in a general population sample be of benefit?

2) If the authors insist on summarizing the extant literature in a table rather than in the text, which may be acceptable for this Journal, they could at least mention a couple of important facts in the text, for example, the range of values that have been reported for Se, Sp and PPV in those studies that have been conducted to date. My concern with the current mode of presentation is that the reader is left to pore over the details of the table to learn what has been done/found previously. A simple improvement would be to move the sentence in the Discussion that begins with “The previous estimates …” (bottom of p.10) to the Introduction.

3) In the section entitled “Mental Health Assessment” (p.7), the authors clarify that EDNOS included cases that met all but one of the criteria for AN or BN and cases of BED and that the SCID produced current and lifetime diagnoses of these disorders. But it is still not clear what this entailed. For example, what of disorders that meet criteria for BN or BED but have frequency of binge eating or compensatory behaviors of only once per week? What of disorders characterized by regular compensatory behaviors (but not binge eating) that occur at a frequency of once per week? If disorders of this kind were excluded then this should be made clear and the implications of this considered in the section of the Discussion that deals with the limitations of the SCID. The reason this is important is that both community-based and clinical studies of eating disorders have consistently found that EDNOS accounts for the majority of cases. Hence, if the criteria and/or the diagnostic instrument employed in the assessment of EDNOS are too narrow, then a significant number of clinically significant disorders are likely to be missed. Arguably, it is the identification of these “borderline” cases that is most critical when screening in community or primary care samples.

4) On a related issue, and whereas I am not familiar with the most recent version
of the SCID, readers with even the barest knowledge of the epidemiology of eating-disordered behavior will surely wonder how it was that only 9 cases of any eating disorder were identified in a sample of some 900 young adult women. Clearly one possible explanation is that the operational criteria for EDNOS employed were overly restrictive. If, as the authors indicate, these 9 cases yielded a weighted point prevalence of any eating disorder for women of 2.26% then it would be helpful to let readers know this. I understand that the authors will present detailed information about prevalence separately, but it would be helpful if the four figures mentioned in their response, namely, current and lifetime prevalence for women and men, were included in the present manuscript, referencing the relevant conference presentation or “in preparation”.

5) In the Discussion the authors note that the findings support the idea that population screening could work best when performed in stages so as to divide the sample into subgroups for further testing, but how this work in practice? Could the authors provide an example or two? Also, and with all due respect to NICE, it is hard to imagine who a measure with such low PPV could be considered the “most promising screening questionnaire for eating disorders to date”.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.