Reviewer's report

Title: Systematic Review: A Single Item Measure of Self-Rated Mental Health

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Reviewer: Ellen Idler

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Review of "Systematic Review: A Single Item Measure of Self-Rated Mental Health"
BioMed Central

This paper reviews the research literature on self-rated mental health. The authors identified 57 studies that analyzed survey data containing a single item asking respondents to rate their overall mental health. No reviews have been previously conducted of such studies, to my knowledge. The studies represent both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs; populations primarily in North America, but elsewhere as well; and a range of correlates including physical health, health services use, and subsequent mental health outcomes. Overall the writing and organization are quite good, and this review could be quite useful for researchers in the future.

1. One potential improvement relates to the authors’ observation in the opening and closing of the paper, that measures of self-rated mental health are "increasingly" used in epidemiologic surveys. The authors should describe the frequency of appearance of these studies over time to substantiate their observation. The data could be displayed in a simple bar or line graph.

2. The point made at the end of the first sentence of the Discussion -- that "there are ethnic differences in responses to the item" seems to refer to the content on p. 11 where ethnic differences in the association between self-rated mental health and specific mental disorders is discussed. This would be a moderating effect of ethnicity, not a first-order correlation between ethnicity and self-rated mental health. The paragraph on p. 11 would benefit from some overall conclusion, and therefore lend some specificity to the observation made in the discussion.

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.