Reviewer’s report

Title: Psychometric properties of self-sufficiency assessment tools in adolescents attending vocational education

Version: 2 Date: 17 June 2015

Reviewer: Matty de Wit

Reviewer’s report:

This is an interesting manuscript about a concept and measurement tool that have quickly gained popularity in the Netherlands. The results are interesting and add to our understanding of the possibilities and impossibilities of the SSM-D. However, I do have a few doubts and suggestions to improve the manuscript.

Major revisions

I do have serious concerns about the use of the data to measure temporal stability with a time lag of 6 months. Even though the authors mention this as a limitation in the discussion and the interpretation is a bit unclear, the general trend suggests that it would imply validity if no change had occurred, indicating a sort of test-retest reliability. However, no other data are available to suggest that in reality no change has occurred. If the situation of the population had indeed changed the opposite conclusion would be drawn, and this would be a test of the sensitivity to change. Since the interpretation of the results is unclear if no information is available about actual change, I would omit these results from the manuscript since their contribution to the validity is unclear.

The concurrent validity of self-sufficiency with other measures are all based on separate domains. It would be interesting to correlate the total SSM-score to some of the other measures, specifically the quality of life measures.

Minor revisions

The authors describe the population as vulnerable, but the high levels of self-sufficiency suggest otherwise. Only small percentages score not to barely self sufficient, and on many domains a large majority scores completely self sufficient. Since the population is described as prone to substance use, the high percentages of a score of 5 on addiction are remarkable. They suggest either a selective response, non-valid answers, or an invalid assumption that this is a vulnerable population. The authors should discuss this in the discussion.

The SSM-D is constructed and validated to measure self-sufficiency among adults from 18 years onwards. In this study, it was applied on a population that is partly below the age of 18. Although this is an interesting application, it should be mentioned in the manuscript that this is new, and that the instrument is not validated for this group yet.

Another aspect worth mentioning is, that the SSM-D also has a supplement of
four additional domains parents, to measure if they are self-sufficient in raising and taking care of their children. In the study population, even though 11% is a parent, the supplement was not used. This might be mentioned as a limitation.

The question about homelessness can be interpreted in two ways. The addition “for at least one night a month, can refer to the lack of perspective or to the permanent place to sleep (at least one night no perspective, or no perspective not even for a night). This should be clarified, and if it was not clear in the questionnaire itself it should be mentioned in the discussion as a limitation.

The self-report questionnaire is described a consisting of a description of the every domain. Since the indicators in the cells are not included, this is the only information the adolescents have to understand what is referred in every domain and therefore very crucial. I would therefore suggest including these descriptions in a table or box in the manuscript.

It might also be helpful to add a link to the website of the SSM-D (www.zrm.nl), so readers can also view the whole instrument when interested.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I am one of the authors that have adapted the original SSM for use in the Netherlands in 2010. I am currently still part of the group that is responsible for the quality of the instrument and therefore involved in research that validates the instrument and makes use of its results in the Netherlands. In addition, we hold the copyright to the instrument at our organization.

I am however, not involved in the research presented in this publication.