

Screening for Mental Disorders in Saudi Arabia: A validation study of the PHQ in Primary Care

Becker, S.¹, Al Zaid, K², Al Faris, E³

¹University of South Florida, ²King Faisal Specialist Hospital , ³King Saud University Medical College

Objectives:

Somatization, the tendency to seek treatment for medically unexplained physical symptoms is an important issue in primary care practice. This study validates the somatoform module of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ), a screening instrument for the identification of somatoform and other mental disorders. The PHQ is utilized to measure the prevalence of somatization and comorbid depression in Saudi Arabian primary care patients.

Methods:

This is a cross sectional study of 431 male and female Saudi Arabian primary care patients with a two stage design for purposes of validation of the somatoform, depression and anxiety modules of the PHQ. The first consecutive 173 patients (40%) completed the self administered Patient Health Questionnaire and were interviewed by mental health professionals using the Structured Clinical Interview (SCID-R). The PHQ was then used to measure the prevalence of somatization, depression and anxiety in 431 primary care patients.

Results

This study validates the somatoform and depression modules of the PHQ with the criterion standard of psychiatric interviews in a Saudi population. The anxiety module was weak in terms of sensitivity and agreement with the criterion standard in this population. Clinically significant rates of somatoform, depression were identified in primary care patients.

Conclusions

The prevalence of somatization and comorbid depression in a primary care population in Saudi Arabia are similar to published rates in the U.S. and worldwide. It is possible to screen primary care patients in international settings for mental disorders and the PHQ is a valid instrument for that purpose. There may be applications of the PHQ to patients from minority groups with low educational levels and poor English fluency.

Key Words: somatization, somatoform, mental disorders, primary care, Patient Health Questionnaire

