

Correspondence

Edited by Kiriakos Xenitidis and
Colin Campbell

Contents

- The Composite International Diagnostic Interview in low- and middle-income countries
- *BDNF* Val66Met polymorphism and the affective component
- Outcome of group psychoeducation for stabilised bipolar disorders
- Abortion and mental health: established facts reconsidered

The Composite International Diagnostic Interview in low- and middle-income countries

Steel *et al*¹ should be commended for using an innovative design to show that the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) 2.0 missed a large proportion of diagnoses that could instead be captured by an indigenously based Phan Vietnamese Psychiatric Scale (PVPS) among Vietnamese. Interpretations of the study should also consider the following.

1. Comparison between the self-report PVPS and CIDI included two other methodological issues that have little to do with whether the PVPS was indigenously devised. First, face-to-face structured interviews have long been shown to bias against Asian populations in eliciting psychiatric symptoms. By contrast, Asian populations typically scored as high as Westerners on many self-report scales such as the General Health Questionnaire.² Second, unlike the 53-item PVPS, the CIDI contains multiple skip-outs from further symptom questioning unless mandatory DSM-IV core symptoms are endorsed. This renders the hierarchically configured CIDI much more prone to false negatives.³
2. The majority of diagnoses captured by the PVPS (72%) were in the somatisation category, but somatoform disorders were not assessed in the CIDI (because of difficulty in operationalising the concept of 'medically unexplained symptoms'). Recent versions of the CIDI (3.0 and 3.1) contain a section on chronic pains and other physical illnesses, which have been shown to be common and highly comorbid with mental disorders in both high-income and low- and middle-income countries.⁴
3. The CIDI surely requires improvement regarding downward bias in prevalence estimates in Asian countries. China has used several versions of it (1.0 to 3.1). By adhering strictly to linguistic accuracy, the earlier versions generated unbelievably low prevalence of depression. Prevalence estimates continue to rise with successive versions and the latest survey using CIDI-3.1, by taking careful account of contextual equivalence of stem questions, interviewer training and quality control in the field, has found a prevalence of depression little different from rates in many Western countries. The Chinese CIDI has also provided highly consistent epidemiological data regarding specific disorder distributions, lifetime rates, psychosocial associations, physical/mental comorbidity, treatment-seeking and the opportunity for large-sample

cross-national analysis.⁵ Enhancement of the CIDI may be both challenging and worth reconsidering in Vietnam.

- 1 Steel Z, Silove D, Giao NM, Phan TTB, Chey T, Whelan A, et al. International and indigenous diagnoses of mental disorder among Vietnamese living in Vietnam and Australia. *Br J Psychiatry* 2009; **194**: 326–33.
- 2 Cheung FM. Psychological symptoms among Chinese in urban Hong Kong. *Soc Sci Med* 1982; **16**: 1339–44.
- 3 Lam CY, Pepper CM, Ryabchenko KA. Case identification of mood disorders in Asian American and Caucasian American college students. *Psychiatr Q* 2004; **75**: 361–73.
- 4 Scott KM, Von Korff M, Alonso J, Angermeyer MC, Bromet E, Fayyad J, et al. Mental-physical co-morbidity and its relationship with disability: results from the World Mental Health Surveys. *Psychol Med* 2009; **39**: 33–43.
- 5 Lee S, Tsang A, Von Korff M, de Graaf R, Benjet C, Haro JM, et al. Association of headache with childhood adversity and mental disorder: cross-national study. *Br J Psychiatry* 2009; **194**: 111–6.

Sing Lee, Department of Psychiatry, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. Email: singlee@cuhk.edu.hk; Adley Tsang, Hong Kong Mood Disorders Center, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong; Wan-jun Guo, Department of Psychiatry, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

doi: 10.1192/bjp.195.2.178

Authors' reply: In summary, our report identified lower diagnostic concordance between the CIDI-2.0 and the indigenously derived PVPS among Vietnamese in the Mekong Delta region compared with Vietnamese in Australia. Whereas rates of mental disorder identified by the PVPS were stable across countries, the CIDI-identified mental disorder was three times lower in the Mekong Delta. Of particular importance was that the CIDI failed to detect 75% of Vietnamese with similar levels of disability identified by the PVPS.

Lee *et al* raise important questions that need to be resolved in order to make sense of the findings of international psychiatric epidemiology. We address some of their concerns in relation to our method. Although technically the PVPS is a questionnaire, it was administered in interview format as is common in the transcultural setting. Moreover, there is some evidence that among Vietnamese, there is a tendency to use a restricted range in reporting symptom severity on questionnaires,¹ a factor that would yield conservative rates. Lee *et al* suggest that the skip rules of the CIDI may lower prevalence rates. We concur that the pre-eminence given to psychological rather than somatic stem symptoms in the hierarchical structure of the CIDI² might limit positive endorsements in non-Western countries. However, if this effect was present it differentially had an impact on the Mekong Delta sample, underscoring the importance of culture and 'Westernisation' as an influence on psychiatric assessment. We look forward to the publication of the results from the Chinese trials of the CIDI-3.1, which have reformulated the stem questions to be more compatible with somatic idioms of distress.

We do note, however, that removing PVPS cases that only reached threshold on the somatisation scale would have reduced our prevalence rates by 2.8% in Vietnam and 3.0% in Australia. Hence, the PVPS would still have identified a substantial number of cases not yielded by the CIDI. We note too that the Western-derived measure of neurasthenia recorded low rates in all samples, suggesting that somatic measures need to be culture specific.

In summary, there does not seem to be any major disagreement here. Whether we produce indigenous measures *ab initio*, as we have done, or modify existing measures as undertaken by Lee *et al* with the CIDI-3.1, the inference we draw remains the same: in order to detect the full range of disabling mental disorders across cultures, we need to have culturally appropriate measurements. We cannot simply apply the same measure with the same wording of items in the same format to all cultures and expect that we can compare the results. The