

An international study of the relation between somatic symptoms and depression

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Background: Patients with depression, particularly those seen by primary care physicians, may report somatic symptoms, such as headache, constipation, weakness, or back pain. Some previous studies have suggested that patients in non-Western countries are more likely to report somatic symptoms than are patients in Western countries. Methods: We used data from the World Health Organization's study of psychological problems in general health care to examine the relation between somatic symptoms and depression. The study, conducted in 1991 and 1992, screened 25,916 patients at 15 primary care centers in 14 countries on 5 continents. A total of 5447 of the patients underwent a structured assessment of depressive and somatoform disorders. Results: A total of 1146 patients (weighted prevalence, 10.1 percent) met the criteria for major depression. The range of patients with depression who reported only somatic symptoms was 45 to 95 percent (overall prevalence, 69 percent; $P=0.002$ for the compa