Comorbid pain related somatisation is common in Latin Americans with major depressive disorder


Q How prevalent is pain related somatisation in Latin Americans with major depressive disorder?

NOTES
These data represent pooled baseline data from two prospective, cohort studies.

Commentary
This brief report describes the relation between depression severity, painful somatic symptoms, and quality of life in Latin American outpatients diagnosed with major depressive disorder. The large sample was recruited from study sites across seven Latin American countries. Reported ethnicity was varied: 38.1% white, 50.7% Hispanic, and the remaining 11.2% were African, Asian, mixed race, or ‘other’. The study was well designed and the authors used reliable and valid diagnostic instruments and other assessment tools, and utilised solid analytic techniques. However, the lack of description of the study sites, such as the percentage of urban versus rural sites or primary care versus specialty care limits conclusions about generalisability. The findings were mostly what one would expect: women were more likely than men to report painful bodily symptoms, such as muscle soreness, neck pain, and headache, and those who reported higher pain levels were more likely to endorse worse depression severity and worse quality of life. The most interesting finding is the lack of a statistically significant relation between ethnicity and painful somatic symptoms associated with depression. This finding differs from other research showing that somatic presentations of depression are more likely to be observed in Latino patients compared with white patients. Further, this finding contrasts sharply with the training of physicians in the United States, who are frequently instructed to consider the possibility of underlying depression in Latinos presenting with medically unexplained physical symptoms. The current results are supported by other large international studies, which have also found no evidence for a culture specific phenomenon regarding greater emphasis of somatic symptoms in depression. Painful somatic complaints are extremely common in people with depression and negatively impact quality of life. Munoz et al’s findings caution against stereotyping Latinos with depression as being more prone to somatisation.

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REFERENCES
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