

Translation, Cultural Adaptation, and Preliminary Evaluation of the Spanish Version of the Transgender Voice Questionnaire for Male-to-Female Transsexuals (TVQ^{MtF})

*Elena Mora, *Alvaro Carrillo, *Ana Giribet, †‡Antonio Becerra, †M^a Jesús Lucio, and *‡Ignacio Cobeta,
*‡‡Madrid, Spain

Summary: Objective. This study aimed to perform translation, cross-cultural adaptation, and validation of the Spanish version of the Transsexual Voice Questionnaire for Male-to-Female Transsexuals (TVQ^{MtF}).

Study Design. This is a prospective study.

Setting. The study was conducted by the Gender Identity Unit and the Voice Unit of a tertiary hospital referral center for surgical feminization of the voice.

Subjects and Methods. The study had two parts: translation and adaptation of the TVQ^{MtF} with the following actions: translation (with authorization and consensus of the authors of the original questionnaire), back-translation, pretesting, and final version; and preliminary study of the psychometric properties (feasibility, internal consistency, test-retest reliability, construct validity, discriminant validity, and ceiling and floor effects). Thirty male-to-female transsexual women filled out the questionnaire, and 18 of the 30 filled out the questionnaire approximately 2 weeks after filling it out for the first time.

Results. Feasibility was 100%. Cronbach α was 0.976. The intraclass correlation coefficient was 0.885. The Spearman correlation coefficient between TVQ^{MtF} and the physical component of SF-12 v2 was 0.102 (P value = 0.592) and between TVQ^{MtF} and the mental component was -0.263 (P value = 0.161). A ceiling effect was not found. A floor effect was found in two questionnaires (6.7%).

Conclusion. Feasibility, internal consistency, and reliability outcomes in our study support the validity of the authorized Spanish version of the TVQ^{MtF}.

Key Words: Transsexuals–Transgender–Voice–Quality of life–TVQ^{MtF}, voice feminization.

INTRODUCTION

Transsexual individuals have gender incongruity with their biological condition and wish to make both physical and behavioral changes to the desired gender.¹ Transsexualism prevalence varies between countries. Male-to-female (MtF) transsexualism is more prevalent than female-to-male (FtM), with an approximate ratio of 2 to 1.² In Spain, the most recent study shows a 1:3205 ratio for MtF transsexuals (MtF T) and 1:7752 for FtM transsexuals (FtM T); both figures are higher than previously published statistics.³

Voice is an essential element in the development of human beings, playing a key role in social, cultural, and family areas. It is an important secondary sexual characteristic, which changes in the transition from childhood to adolescence in puberty. Vocal pitch is very important for gender identification by a listener, as it is associated with femaleness or maleness. Developing a female voice is a key concern for MtF T to be accepted, and integrated in their social and professional life with their desired gender identity.⁴ Frequently, voice remains the main obstacle for MtF T in finding their new sexual identity, even leading them to serious internal mental conflict resulting in psychotherapy.⁵

Sex reassignment includes hormonal treatment, surgery, and the “real-life test” when transsexuals have to live in the desired gender. In FtM T, testosterone masculinizes their bodies and also their voices; therefore, they usually do not need further treatments to achieve a low-pitched voice. In MtF T, the hormonal treatment feminizes the body but does not have any effect on voice,⁶ so other interventions such as speech therapy or surgical feminization of the voice are usually necessary.⁷ Feminization of voice strengthens the sexual identity of the MtF T, the way they relate with their bodies and their self-esteem and overall improves their quality of life (QOL).⁸

Voice feminization approaches try to elevate the fundamental frequency resulting in a high-pitched voice, which is usually perceived as a female voice. Other parameters influencing femininity of the voice such as intonation, resonance, or somehow breathy voice quality must be addressed exclusively with speech therapy.^{4,9}

Self-evaluation has become an essential part of any approach in medicine, especially when talking about functional impairments. Self-evaluation of individuals helps professionals appreciate how important the handicap is for the person and measures the effects of different treatments. The results of instrumental measures or subjective perceptions of the professional do not always fit with the perceptions of the individual. In the field of speech therapy, the self-assessment or the individual's perceptions about vocal functioning in the context of their lives is a recommendation of the Committee on Phoniatrics of the European Laryngological Society before and after therapy.¹⁰

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From the *Voice Unit, Otolaryngology Department, Hospital Universitario “Ramón y Cajal,” Madrid, Spain; †Gender Identity Unit, Hospital Universitario “Ramón y Cajal,” Madrid, Spain; and the ‡Universidad de Alcalá, Madrid, Spain.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Elena Mora, Ctra Colmenar Viejo Km 9,100, 28034 Madrid, Spain. E-mail: elenamorarivas@gmail.com

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There are many voice-related QOL questionnaires. Voice Handicap Index (VHI) and its abbreviated version VHI-10 are among the most used tests to analyze physical, functional, and emotional aspects of individuals with voice problems.¹¹ This questionnaire does not specifically address voice problems in transsexual individuals.¹² In 2006, Dacakis, Davies, and their team at the University of La Trobe (Melbourne, Victoria, Australia) and University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada) developed the Transgender Self-Assessment Questionnaire. In 2012, they developed the Transsexual Voice Questionnaire for MtF T (TVQ^{MtF}), with the aim of offering a more specific voice-related QOL questionnaire.¹³ With this questionnaire, professionals in the field of voice feminization in MtF transsexualism, such as speech-pathologists or laryngeal surgeons, can guide therapy in each case and also monitor the effects of any intervention. With the cultural adaptation and validation of this questionnaire in the Spanish language, we could better understand the self-perception of voice handicap in MtF transsexuals and develop strategies to improve their voice feminization.

TVQ^{MtF} has been adapted to the Portuguese language by H. Matta dos Santos in March 2015,¹⁴ and this is the only published cross-cultural adaptation of this test to date. It is not yet available in the Spanish language. As Spanish is the second most spoken language in the world after Chinese,¹⁵ it is important for the TVQ^{MtF} to be translated to this language and adapted for use in Spain.

The purposes of this project are to translate the questionnaire into the Spanish language and to validate the Spanish version of the TVQ^{MtF}. The authorized Spanish translation of the TVQ^{MtF}, developed with the guide and permission of G. Dacakis, is available on the website of one of the authors of the original questionnaire, Shelagh Davies (<http://www.shelaghdavies.com/>).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects

We performed a prospective exploratory study on MtF transsexuals attending the Gender Identity Unit of Hospital Ramón y Cajal in Madrid, Spain. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Clinical Investigation.

Inclusion criteria were the following: MtF transsexualism, not having undergone any surgery for voice surgical feminization, age older than 18 years, Spanish as the native language, and comprehension of the purposes of the study.

We also collected the following information of the participants: how long each MtF T had lived as a female, how long they had taken hormonal treatment, and if they had undergone voice therapy to feminize their voice.

Materials

Participants were informed about the characteristics of the study and signed a consent form. The following tests were administered to them:

- TVQ^{MtF}: This questionnaire consists of 30 items assessing self-perceived vocal quality and impact of the voice in MtF

transsexuals. It had to be answered based on participants' personal experience living as a woman. To evaluate the relevance of each item, the possible answers are 1 = *never or rarely*; 2 = *sometimes*; 3 = *often*; and 4 = *frequently or always*. The higher the score is, the less feminine is the self-perceived voice, meaning that it interferes with their QOL in all the aforementioned aspects.¹³ At the end, the subject is asked to describe her voice as *very feminine*, *somewhat feminine*, *neutral*, *somewhat masculine*, or *very masculine*, currently and also in an ideal situation.

- SF-12 v2: This is a generic health instrument, a multipurpose short-form survey with 12 questions that, when combined, scored, and weighted, provides results in two domains: mental and physical functioning and overall health-related QOL. It is scored from 0 to 44 (lowest to highest QOL). It was validated in the Spanish language in 1998.¹⁶ It consists of 12 questions with a Likert scale evaluating the frequency or the intensity of situations or symptoms related to QOL of individuals.

Translation and transcultural adaptation

Our study was conducted following the proposed guidelines for cross-cultural adaptation of health-related measures of QOL, similarly to other QOL questionnaires validations to Spanish language.^{17–21} After obtaining permission from the authors, the original version of the TVQ^{MtF} was translated into Spanish by three independent bilingual Spanish-English speakers with experience in translation. The three translated versions were reviewed by an expert panel in transsexualism, one endocrinologist, four laryngeal surgeons, and one sociologist, who discussed with the translators for the most appropriate translation and vote in case of discrepancies.

Three independent native English speakers, also Spanish-English bilinguals, without expertise in transsexualism and without prior knowledge of the TVQ^{MtF}, performed the back-translation for this questionnaire. Two of them teach English language in Spain. An expert panel harmonized the three versions with the original questionnaire, with the aim of maintaining the conceptual equivalence of the questionnaires, and also attained the approval of one of the original authors of the TVQ^{MtF}. They voted in case of discrepancies.

To test comprehension and suitability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with 20 non-transgender participants attending Otolaryngology Department Clinics, Spanish-language speakers older than 18 years, and able to read. This study is also called the pretest or cognitive interviewing, a questionnaire applied before cross-cultural adaptation just to find out if the translated questionnaire made sense in the Spanish language. Each participant was asked whether it was difficult to understand each item and whether it was easy to understand the meaning of the questions. Transgender individuals were not required at this point not to interfere with their personal feelings; the only purpose was to test comprehension by a Spanish speaker regardless of sex, age, or sexual identity. If discrepancies appeared, these were submitted to voting by the expert panel in transsexualism.

This phase resulted in the authorized Spanish version of the TVQ^{MtF} (Figure 1), which was reviewed by one of the authors

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