

PSYCHOMETRICS

Sexual Modes Questionnaire (SMQ): Translation and Psychometric Properties of the Italian Version of the Automatic Thought Scale



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ABSTRACT

Background: The Sexual Modes Questionnaire (SMQ) is a validated and widespread used tool to assess the association among negative automatic thoughts, emotions, and sexual response during sexual activity in men and women.

Aim: To test the psychometric characteristics of the Italian version of the SMQ focusing on the Automatic Thoughts subscale (SMQ-AT).

Methods: After linguistic translation, the psychometric properties (internal consistency, construct, and discriminant validity) were evaluated. 1,051 participants (425 men and 626 women, 776 healthy and 275 clinical groups complaining about sexual problems) participated in the present study.

Outcomes: 2 confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to test the fit of the original factor structures of the SMQ versions. In addition, 2 principal component analyses were performed to highlight 2 new factorial structures that were further validated with confirmatory factor analyses. Cronbach α and composite reliability were used as internal consistency measures and differences between clinical and control groups were run to test the discriminant validity for the male and female versions. The associations with emotions and sexual functioning measures also are reported.

Results: Principal component analyses identified 5 factors in the male version: erection concerns thoughts, lack of erotic thoughts, age- and body-related thoughts, negative thoughts toward sex, and worries about partner's evaluation and failure anticipation thoughts. In the female version 6 factors were found: sexual abuse thoughts, lack of erotic thoughts, low self-body image thoughts, failure and disengagement thoughts, sexual passivity and control, and partner's lack of affection. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the adequacy of the factor structure for men and women. Moreover, the SMQ showed a strong association with emotional response and sexual functioning, differentiating between clinical and control groups.

Clinical Translation: This measure is useful to evaluate patients and design interventions focused on negative automatic thoughts during sexual activity and to develop multicultural research.

Strengths and Limitations: This study reports on the translation and validation of the Italian version of a clinically useful and widely used measure (assessing automatic thoughts during sexual activity). Limits regarding sampling technique and use of the Automatic Thoughts subscale are discussed in the article.

Conclusion: The present findings support the validity and the internal consistency of the Italian version of the SMQ-AT and allow the assessment of negative automatic thoughts during sexual activity for clinical and research purposes. **Nimbi FM, Tripodi F, Simonelli C, Nobre P. Sexual Modes Questionnaire (SMQ): Translation and Psychometric Properties of the Italian Version of the Automatic Thought Scale. J Sex Med 2018;15:396–409.**

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Key Words: Automatic Thoughts; Gender and sexual stereotypes; Psychometric Properties; Sexual Dysfunctions; Questionnaire Validation; Italian Population

Received August 8, 2017. Accepted January 5, 2018.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2018.01.002>

INTRODUCTION

Modes are defined as specific sub-organizations within the personality structure composed by a network of interdependent cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The cognitive structures are supported by schemas (core beliefs), which are automatic thoughts (ATs) activated by specific environmental situations and stimuli. These cognitive structures are directly associated with behavioral and emotional responses to evaluate, make quick decisions, and achieve an aim or protect against danger (real or perceived). In accord with the cognitive behavioral therapy framework, many psychopathologic disorders can be conceptualized as constellations of modes characterized by fear thoughts, anxiety responses, and behavioral urges to escape or react dysfunctionally.¹

Many clinical studies have focused on the cognitive and affective factors of sexual dysfunctions.^{2–5} The main results showed that men and women with sexual dysfunctions compared with healthy samples are more focused on negative thoughts than on erotic internal and external stimuli during sexual activities. This lack of attention can decrease sexual desire and subjective and physiologic arousal.^{6–13}

In accord with the cognitive-affective model for sexual dysfunction by Barton,¹⁴ Nobre and Pinto-Gouveia¹⁵ developed the Sexual Modes Questionnaire (SMQ) assessing the interaction among ATs, emotions, and sexual response (SR) during sexual activity. The SMQ is used to evaluate different classes of cognitions triggered by men and women during sexual activity about failure anticipation, disengagement, age concerns, body image, erotic thoughts, sexual abuse, control, passivity, and conservatism. These thoughts are specific to the person's sex, heterosexually oriented, and stereotypically based: the male part is more focused on performance, worries about the erection, failures, and consequences, whereas the female part is centered on feelings of abuse, body image concerns, partner's reactions, performance, and failure thoughts. A detailed description of the questionnaire is reported in the Measures section. Good coefficients of test-retest reliability and internal consistency were showed in the original version¹⁵ and in the Iranian translation.¹²

Since the first validation, the SMQ was assessed in several studies.^{16–33} For the male sexual response, Carvalho and Nobre^{18,19} found that lack of erotic thoughts, erection concerns, shame, and sadness were the main predictors of low sexual desire levels. For women,^{22,23} ATs during sexual activity were the best predictors of sexual desire (eg, lack of erotic thoughts, failure and disengagement feelings, and passivity perceptions during sex). Sex comparisons highlighted the predominance of hurt emotions during sexual activity in women, whereas men reported more shame and fear.^{20,21}

The SMQ also was found to distinguish between clinical (with sexual dysfunctions) and sexually healthy samples in many studies.^{12,15,24–30} Results indicated that men and women with sexual dysfunctions report significantly more negative thoughts

during sexual activity compared with sexually healthy individuals. Men with sexual dysfunctions reported significantly more thoughts related to erection concerns, failure and catastrophizing, and lack of erotic thoughts during sexual activity. In addition, men with sexual dysfunctions presented significantly more emotions of disillusion, sadness, and fear and less satisfaction or pleasure compared with sexually healthy men.^{24–26} These general findings were confirmed in studies of erectile dysfunction²⁷ and of men with genital pain.^{28,29}

Women with sexual dysfunctions reported more thoughts about being abused by partners, failure and disengagement, partner's lack of affection, and sexual passivity and control, which were generally associated with negative emotions (eg, anger, guilt, and sadness).^{17,24–26} Failure and disengagement thoughts also were significant predictors of hypoactive sexual desire disorder.²⁶ Sexual abuse thoughts and lack of partner's affection were significant in women with persistent genital arousal disorder.³⁰

For different sexual orientations, similar pathways were observed in gay men and lesbian women using an adapted version of the SMQ.^{31–33}

Therefore, the assessment of negative ATs is an important domain to be considered in the assessment and treatment of sexual problems. As a result, the use of tools such as the SMQ in different countries could facilitate multicultural research and improve the adoption of holistic patient care.

AIMS

The present study explored the internal reliability, construct, and discriminant validity of the Italian versions of the SMQ for men and women. The original questionnaire was translated into Italian; construct validity and reliability of the Automatic Thoughts subscale were evaluated using principal component analysis (PCA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and Cronbach α . Discriminant validity was tested by comparing scores of sexually clinical and healthy groups. Associations of ATs with emotions and sexual functioning also were reported. In addition, to compare the impact of cultural variables on subjective sexual functioning, we investigated the nature of ATs in an Italian population.

METHODS

Participants and Procedures

1,051 volunteers (425 men and 626 women) from the general population participated in the study. People were recruited using a snowball technique from the faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome and by advertisements on a website (www.sessuologiaclinicaroma.it) and social networks (Facebook and LinkedIn). Participants were given a personal identification code to access a web survey (available on Google.docs platform) to restrict each participant to 1 response. Data were collected online, protected by a private identification and an

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