

Short communication

Cross-cultural validation of the Chalder Fatigue Questionnaire in Brazilian primary care

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Received 19 June 2006; received in revised form 28 September 2006; accepted 24 October 2006

Abstract

Objective: The Chalder Fatigue Questionnaire (CFQ) is an instrument used to measure physical and mental fatigue. We translated and adapted the questionnaire and tested its reliability and validity in a Brazilian primary care setting. **Method:** A pilot study with 204 consecutive primary care attenders in São Paulo, Brazil, verified the internal consistency and factor structure of the questionnaire. After some modifications through a rigorous translation, back-translation, and cross-cultural adaptation procedure, a validation study was conducted with 304 attenders, who also completed the fatigue section of the Revised Clinical Interview Schedule (CIS-R). **Results:** The internal consistency of

the Brazilian CFQ slightly improved from the pilot to the validation study: Cronbach's alpha from .86 to .88. The two-factor structure (physical and mental fatigue) also improved. According to the receiver operating curve analysis with the fatigue section of the CIS-R as the standard criterion, 3/4 was chosen as the cutoff for Brazilian primary care (sensitivity 69.1% and specificity 79.4%). **Conclusion:** The Brazilian CFQ had good reliability and validity. The cutoff was determined as 3/4 and the factor structure of the English CFQ was closely reproduced.

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Keywords: Fatigue; Cross-cultural; Validation; Questionnaire; Primary care; Brazil

Introduction

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is characterized by severe physical and mental fatigue, physical and mental fatigability occurring after minimal activity, and other accompanying symptoms, which cannot be explained by any other medical condition and have persisted for at least 6 months [1]. The Chalder Fatigue Questionnaire (CFQ) has

been developed and widely used either to measure the severity of fatigue or as an aid for assessing patients with CFS [2]. The original validation work reported the scale to be both reliable and valid with a high degree of internal consistency and a two-factor structure (physical and mental fatigue) [2]. The CFQ has been used in Brazil but had not been validated in that setting [3,4]. As preliminary steps for a cross-cultural study of CFS in Brazil and the United Kingdom (UK) [5], a pilot study was conducted in 2001 to verify the feasibility of the main study and provide data on the internal consistency and factor structure of the Brazilian version of the CFQ. A formal validation study for the Brazilian CFQ was conducted in July and August 2003. We report here the results of the pilot and the validation studies.

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Method

Translation, back-translation, and cross-cultural adaptation

Previous versions of the CFQ used in Brazil have not been formally validated. Hence, a properly designed validation study was conducted in 2003, following a published guideline on cross-cultural adaptation of health-related measures [6]. Two sets of translations and back-translations of the CFQ were prepared. One translator was a Brazilian psychiatrist (H.J.C.), who had translated the original English version into Portuguese for the pilot study in 2001 and improved the 2001 version according to the pilot study results. The other was a bilingual Brazilian psychologist. The two back-translators were English teachers of British origin who had been living in Brazil for many years. Except for H.J.C., all of them were unaware of the intent and the concepts underlying the material. Consequently, there were two back-translations. Each of them was compared against the original questionnaire by a native British psychiatrist, who drew attention to semantic issues. Finally, a panel of three Brazilian psychiatrists was organized to prepare the penultimate version of the questionnaire. Comprehensibility and appropriateness of the language in the Brazilian cultural context were emphasized for the translation and cross-cultural adaptation procedure. For example, it was noted that a proportion of Brazilian patients associated the word “tiredness” (*cansaço*) with breathlessness due to exertion. Hence, the first item of the questionnaire “Do you have problems with tiredness?” was translated into “Do you have problems with tiredness or weakness? (*Você tem problema de cansaço ou fraqueza?*)” in order to avoid ambiguity. The pretest involved five primary care patients in Sao Paulo in July 2003. They filled in the penultimate version and were asked probing questions such as “What do you mean by that response?” in regard to items answered affirmatively. According to the results of the pretest, the final version for the validation study was prepared.

Subjects

The pilot study comprised 207 consecutive attenders at four general practices across Sao Paulo. The age range was limited to 18–45 years because of the increasing prevalence of medically explained fatigue in older age groups. Three responders had missing data and were excluded from the analysis. The validation study involved 304 consecutive attenders at two general practices in southwest Sao Paulo aged between 18 and 45 years.

Procedure

For the 2001 pilot study, after signing a brief informed consent, the participants completed the CFQ and the

12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) [7]. The questionnaires were read out to the illiterate and functionally illiterate participants. For the 2003 validation study, we followed the same procedure and conducted an additional interview using the fatigue section of the Revised Clinical Interview Schedule (CIS-R) [8], against which the Brazilian CFQ was validated following the method used for the original version of the CFQ [2]. The content of the CIS-R fatigue section is reasonably neutral culturally speaking, avoiding etiological assumptions or culturally biased concepts of fatigue. Hence, the use of the CIS-R fatigue section should not affect the cultural sensitivity of the interview. The Brazilian version of the CIS-R has been tested for the feasibility and recurrently used [9,10].

Analysis

From the participants of the pilot ($n=204$) and the validation ($n=304$) studies, internal consistency was measured by Cronbach's alpha [11]. A principal component analysis followed by a varimax rotation was carried out with the items of the CFQ. The sensitivity and specificity were calculated for all possible cutoff points in a receiver operating characteristic (ROC) analysis of the participants of the validation study, with the CIS-R fatigue section as the standard criterion.

Results

Internal consistency

Data from the pilot study showed a high degree of internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .86 (Table 1). The same was true for the validation study ($\alpha=.88$).

Principal component analyses

The principal component analysis of the pilot study data suggested a two-dimensional solution with two factors presenting an eigenvalue of 1 or more (4.59 and 1.36),

Table 1
Comparison of the internal consistency and the ROC analysis between the pilot study, the validation study, and the Chalder et al. study [2]

	Pilot study	Validation study	Chalder et al. [2]
<i>N</i> (participants)	204	304	100
Cronbach's alpha	.86	.88	.89
Cutoff point	–	3/4	3/4
Sensitivity	–	69.1	75.5
Specificity	–	79.4	74.5
AUROC	–	0.84	0.85
Items included	11	11	14

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