Confirming The One-Item Question Likert Scale To Measure Anxiety

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Citation

Abstract
Background: A previous study has confirmed the feasibility of one-item question scales to adequately measure current anxiety in a female-only sample in clinical settings. This study aims to further determine whether a one-question likert scale can be used in measuring anxiety in the general population for both genders.

Method: A convenience sample of adults, recruited via a smartphone application (app) published freely in Apple’s app store that have completed the Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) questionnaire and a one-item anxiety question scale.

Result: 1,233 participants from the US, UK, Australia, and Canada completed the questionnaire. 67% of participants were female, with a high school education level, and a relatively young age, while the participants’ mean age was 28.7. Chi-square analysis has shown no significant differences between countries, in terms of gender χ² (3, N = 1233) = 4.5 p = .21, education level χ² (9, N = 1233) = 14.5 p = .10, and age F(3,1232) = 1.52, p = .21. There was a strong, positive, partial correlation between SPIN score and the one-question anxiety scale, controlling for age, gender, country, and education, r = .72, p < .001, with a high SPIN score being associated with a higher score on the one-question anxiety scale. An inspection of the zero order correlation (r =.73) suggested that age, gender, country, and education had very little effect on the strength of the relationship between SPIN score and the one-question anxiety scale.

Conclusion: This study confirmed that the one-question anxiety scale is suitable to be used to measure anxiety in both genders.

BACKGROUND
A previous study has examined the feasibility of using a one-item question scale to adequately measure current anxiety [1]. The study compared the one-item anxiety scale against the Spielberger State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) [2] and found a good positive correlation between the STAI and the one-item measures [1]. Although the study found the one-item anxiety scale adequate to measure levels of current anxiety, their sample only included women in a clinical setting.

The Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) [3] is a 17-item scale commonly used as a self-rating questionnaire for social anxiety, and features good psychometric properties [3,4]. In addition, SPIN has been used successfully to screen the general population for social anxiety disorder (SAD) in various ages, gender groups, and delivery platforms (e.g., Internet screening) [5-7].

This study is part of a health monitoring app project to evaluate the feasibility of using smartphone apps for health tracking and monitoring with various repeat measures, in which measuring the participant anxiety at each giving task is a secondary measure. Similar to Davey et al.[1], we were interested to know if we can reduce participants’ efforts in filling the repeated measure by using only a single-item measure of anxiety. The purpose of this study was to determine whether a one-question likert scale can be used in measuring anxiety in the general population, for both genders, via a smartphone app in place of the SPIN.

METHOD
Design: A free smartphone app has been developed, utilising the health monitor template[8], and was released globally in the Apple app store [Figure 1]. After agreeing to the participant information and consent that were provided in the terms of use statement, and summarised in the app download page, Apple store users aged 18 and above can download the app. After filling out the demographic information, participants can use the SPIN to screen or monitor their anxiety, as the app will save the participant’s results on their
devices. After completing the SPIN questionnaire, the app will ask participants to answer the one-question likert scale for current anxiety, as described in the Davey et al. study: “Please circle the number that shows how anxious you feel at the moment”. If you circle ‘1’, you are feeling not at all anxious at the moment. If you circle ‘5’, you are feeling the most anxious you could ever imagine. If you circle ‘3’, you are feeling moderately anxious” [1]. The answers thus consisted of five evenly spaced numbers, each anchored to a separate level of anxiety “1=not at all anxious, 2=a little anxious, 3=moderately anxious, 4=very anxious, 5=extremely anxious” [1]. The demographic information, SPIN, and the one-item question answers will be sent directly from the user device to our research database as soon as the internet connection is available. Each participant was issued a unique device identifier to link their result to our database; this will help in eliminating the registration process and preventing duplication, as each device has only one chance of being in our database and, finally, to ensure anonymity. No personally identifying, contact, or other personal data were collected. To prevent the problem of missing data, participants cannot submit their answers before completing all the demographics and required questionnaire responses. After completion of this study, the research data collection module embedded in the app, as described in health monitor template[8], was removed so participants can use the app as long as they want.

Data analysis: Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographics. Chi-square and one-way analysis of variance were used to examine differences in demographics. Spearman’s and partial correlation tests were also used to examine the correlation between the score and one-question anxiety scale. Multivariate regression analysis assisted in describing the size of the change in SPIN score for a standardized unit change in the one-question anxiety scale.

RESULTS

Over five months from August 2012 through January 2013, 1,233 participants from the US, UK, Australia, and Canada who completed the questionnaire were included in this paper analysis. The majority of participants were female, with high school education level, and a relatively young mean age (Table 1). Chi-square analysis showed no significant differences between countries, in terms of gender X2 (3, N = 1233) = 4.5 p = .21, or education level X2 (9, N = 1233) = 14.5 p = .10. Furthermore, there was no significant difference between countries’ participants in term of age F (3, 1232) = 1.19, p = .31.

Table 1
Participants’ characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean (S.D.)) (years)</td>
<td>28.7 (8.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>828 (67.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>405 (32.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>148 (12.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>102 (8.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United kingdom</td>
<td>304 (24.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>679 (55.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>668 (55.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate (Bachelor)</td>
<td>242 (19.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Degree or higher</td>
<td>66 (5.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>237 (19.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spearman’s correlation between SPIN scores and the one-question anxiety scale was reasonably high, at r = .73, p < .001, indicating a strong relationship between these measurement tools. In addition, as there were no significant differences between the countries in terms of participants’ gender, age, or educational level, after ensuring that there were no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity, a partial correlation was used to explore the relationship between SPIN score and the one-question anxiety scale. There was a strong, positive, partial correlation between SPIN score and the one-question anxiety scale, r = .72, p < .001, with high SPIN score being associated with a higher score on the one-question anxiety scale. An inspection of the zero order correlation (r = .73) suggested that age, gender, country, and education had very little effect on the strength of the relationship between SPIN score and the one-question anxiety scale. In addition, after controlling for age, gender, country, and education, regression analysis indicated that the one-question anxiety scale relates to the SPIN score in a comparable manner. The regression coefficients (beta), which describe the size of the change in
SPIN score per a standardized unit change in the one-
question anxiety scale, which was 8.4 (95%CI: 7.8 - 8.4).

DISCUSSION
The result of the correlation between the SPIN score and the
one-question anxiety scale was relatively high and does not
seem to be affected by other factors such as age, gender,
country, or education. The Consistent level of comparability
between the one-question anxiety scale and SPIN, which has
been validated to screen for anxiety in the general population
and various age and gender groups, suggest that this one
item scale can be used to measure anxiety adequately in
similar situations. While the previous study evaluate the one-
question anxiety scale only for female participants in a
clinical setting, our study found it is suitable for both
genders, without any significant effects to gender or age on
the correlation score. In addition, our results are similar to
Davey et al.’s results that compare the one-question anxiety
scale to another anxiety scale (Spielberger State Trait
Anxiety Inventory (STAI)). This again indicates that the
one-question anxiety scale is fast and adequately measures
anxiety when compared to two well-validated anxiety scales
(SPIN & STAI). However, although the use of such scale is
convenient in some situations, it is not an anxiety diagnostic
test and its specificity and accuracy of diagnosing anxiety
disorders compared to other anxiety scales has not been
established.

CONCLUSION
This study confirmed that the one-question anxiety scale is
suitable to be used to measure anxiety in both genders. The
reduction of the number of anxiety questions form 17items
to just one item will have a significant effect on the length of
any questionnaire, its completion time, and response rate.
However, using the one-question anxiety scale as such
should be evaluated against the study’s required level of
sensitivity and accuracy.

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drafting of the manuscript. All authors participated in study
design, editing, and revising the manuscript. All authors read
and approved the final manuscript.

References
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