Author's response to reviews

Title: Telephone and face to face methods of assessment of veteran’s community reintegration yield equivalent results

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Reviewer Team,

Thank-you for your helpful feedback on manuscript #2131062839532408: Telephone and face to face methods of assessment of veteran's community reintegration yield equivalent results. We have carefully considered your comments and have revised the manuscript accordingly. Please note that all major additions to the manuscript are indicated in bold in the text. Our point by point responses to comments are included in the detailed response attached below.

Thank-you again for your constructive feedback,

Sincerely,

Linda Resnik
Reviewer 2:

Review report

The manuscript analyzes the equivalence of a telephone–based version of the Community Re-integration of Service Members (CRIS) questionnaire. This study should be considered as a psychometric analysis of the validity of two versions of a questionnaire. Thus, if the in-person CRIS is considered as the gold standard, the authors need to assess the concurrent criterion validity, this is, the prediction of an alternative method of measuring a variable (the telephone-based measure).

Thank-you for this observation. We agree with the Reviewer’s synopsis of the purpose and recommendation to describe one of our specific purposes as assessment of concurrent criterion validity of the telephone mode of administration. We have revised the purpose statement accordingly on p.8.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Abstract results section is very scarce. This section should include some demographic information of the participants and include the 95% confidence intervals of the Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (ICC).

We have added the 95% confidence intervals for the ICCs to the results section. We added a synopsis of demographic information to the description of subjects in the Methods section.

2. The introduction is attractive but needs to be shortened. The issues related to the differences between telephone and in-person administration might be treated in more detail in the discussion section taking into account the study results.

We shortened the introduction as suggested by the Reviewer by shifting the detailed discussion of differences between survey modes to the discussion. We’ve added brief commentary linking our findings to this discussion of the literature.

3. The authors should make explicit a priori hypotheses for the expected association between telephone and in-person scores of the CRIS.

We added several explicit a priori hypotheses to the introduction as follows: We hypothesized that 1) CRIS scores derived from the telephone administration would be equivalent to those derived through in-person administration; and 2) that order of survey mode administration would not influence CRIS scores.

4. The authors should to explicit why the sample size was of 102 subjects. There was some sample size calculation? If not, it could be appropriate to inform about the statistical power and the effect size.

To confirm that our sample size of 102 persons was adequate, we conducted post-hoc power calculations using the method described by Donner and Eljaszew. We have included the following summary of that analysis in the text, “For the reliability analysis, we estimate that we have achieved power of 80% to detect an ICC of 0.9 under the alternative hypothesis (approximate CRIS subscale ICCs), when the ICC under the null hypothesis is 0.81, using an F-test with alpha=0.05, and two samples of 50 persons each.”

5. In the Methods sections the authors must include information of each
registered variable. For example, in results section, there is information related to depression diagnosis, PDSD diagnosis (¿?),…This information was obtained after a medical chart review.

Thank-you for this suggestion. We have added a paragraph to the data collection section describing the demographic and medical information collected at visit 1. We also added a sentence to the statistical methods section that explains how we compared characteristics of subjects in the 2 groups.

6. Which version of the ICC was used? (i.e. one-way or two-way, random or mixed effects). 95% confidence intervals of ICC must be included in all the ICC reported.

The type of ICC is indicated on p. 10. We used intraclass correlation coefficients, ICC (2,1).

7. To assess the effect of the order of administration, the authors could use the Bland & Altman methodology (Bland JM, Altman DG. Comparing two methods of clinical measurement: a personal history. Int J Epidemiol 1995;24 Suppl 1:S7-14) to assess graphically whether the difference between the two measures was (in-person and telephone-based) related to the magnitude of the measure.

After reviewing literature on Bland-Altman methodology, we agree that it is a valuable tool designed to replace the naïve usage of Pearson correlations. However, we prefer ICCs, which provide clear numerical results, over the Bland Altman plots which are somewhat open to interpretation and are not as frequently used.

8. In the results section, the authors state that demographics were similar between groups. The p-values of the comparison analyses between groups should be included in Table 1.

The text now reads, “No statistically significant differences between groups were observed for any of the characteristics shown in Table 1.” We do not think that it is useful to show the P values for these comparisons, since none reached or approached significance. Our lowest P value was .115 for income.

Minor Essential Revisions
1. All the abbreviation used in the manuscript should be defined the first time they appear (including in tables using a footnote)

We have gone through the manuscript to be sure that all abbreviations were defined when they were first introduced.

2. Table two has no information related to the groups (telephone or in-person) and is not possible to identify the score value of each group.

Our apologies for this oversight. The group labels have been added to the column headings.

Reviewer 1
Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions
None requested

Minor Essential Revisions
1. First full paragraph on page 3, under “Background” section, the text reads “…Iraq and Afghanistan (Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom [OIF/OEF]). Subsequent references to the wars are written “OEF/OIF.” The latter is the VA recommended presentation. The sentence in the first paragraph on page three should be revised to this format (OEF/OIF).

Thank-you for this clarification. The sentence in the first paragraph has been changed to OEF/OIF.
2. In the first sentence of first full paragraph on page 7 the author’s state “Greater social distance between the respondent…” From the sociological literature, social distance refers to demographic differences, such as race, ethnicity, class, education, etc. I suspect the author’s are saying that an interviewer’s diminished physical presence can lead to a sense of participant anonymity which can lead to more disclosure. If my reading is correct, then social distance should be revised to physical distance (or some similar phrasing).
We appreciate this suggestion, and have revised to read, “physical distance.”

3. Page 7, under the paragraph in the Order of Administration section, last sentence reading “Thus, we examined…” There should be a space between words.
This was corrected.

4. Page 7 and 8: In the paragraph that begins on page 7 reading “No prior studies…” participants are referred to as “veterans”, then two sentences later as “patients”, and in the sentence following as “subjects”. The changes in label threw me. I realize this is research on a veteran patient population and it is standard to refer to research participants as “subjects”, but it might make for easier reading to use a participant label consistently throughout the manuscript.
We have used the term “subjects” throughout.

5. Page 8, second sentence under Data Collection, the authors write “The interview script was fined…” Do they mean refined?
Yes, this was corrected.

Discretionary Revisions

6. Last sentence of first full paragraph on page 6 the authors state “It is theorized that non-verbal cues provided through face-to-face interviewing can enhance the motivation of participants, keeping them more engaged and thus more likely to carefully respond.” I would caution the use of the phrase “It is theorized” because it is not clear if it is the authors theorizing or others. If others, the authors should cite them. See Holstein and Gubrium’s (1995) The Active Interview for a discussion on interpersonal dynamics during the face-to-face interview session, including a discussion of the unintended negative consequences of the interviewer’s facial expressions and body posture.
We edited this sentence to read, “Non-verbal cues provided through face-to-face interviewing could potentially enhance the motivation of subjects, keeping them more engaged and thus more likely to carefully respond.”