Reviewer's report

Title: The Modified Dental Anxiety Scale: UK population norms in 2008

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Reviewer: Sven G Carlsson

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Humphrey et al. present normative data for the Modified Dental Anxiety Scale, a modification of the widely used Corah's Dental Anxiety Scale. The modified scale was presented in 1995 by Humphrey and co-workers, together with normative data.

In the present investigation, data were collected in a telephone survey including 1000 respondents, supposedly representative for the UK adult population. Results are presented in different breakdowns based on sex, age, dental visiting habits, education and social class. Useful percentile tables are presented for three age classes in males and females.

This is an adequately written paper from a competent research group. It straightforwardly presents the necessary information about their instrument in order to improve it's usefulness in clinic and research. I have only two remarks, to considered for a discretionary revision by the authors:

1. One question concerns the relation between the present study and the paper from 1995 where the instrument was first presented. That paper, according to the authors, provides "norms for phobic and nonphobic subjects", based upon 1392 individuals having been tested with the new instrument. The authors should inform the reader (who may have used the 1995 norms all since) why it is now necessary to start using the new norms.

2. The attrition problems with a telephone interview are becoming more and more disturbing, partly because of the soaring usage of cell phones instead of the old stationary ones. The authors are aware of the problem, and tell us that “every effort was made by the market research company to ensure a representative sample”. The potential user of the new norms may want more substantial information on this representativity jeopardy.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.