Author’s response to reviews

Title: New Partnerships among Single Older Adults: A Q Methodology Study

Authors:

Su-Fei Huang (s331@mail.mkc.edu.tw)
Chiu-Mieh Huang (cmhuang@ym.edu.tw)
Shueh-Fen Chen (sfchen@ems.cku.edu.tw)
Li-Ting Lu (ltlu@knjc.edu.tw)
Jong-Long Guo (jonglong@ntnu.edu.tw)

Version: 1 Date: 22 Nov 2018

Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor-in-Chief

Thank you for the opportunity to revise our manuscript. We have read the reviewers’ comments and made the required changes to our manuscript. Below we have included the comments and our responses.

We are very grateful for your interest in our work and are looking forward to your next correspondence.

Very sincerely,

Jong-Long Guo

Distinguished Professor of Department of Health Promotion and Health Education,
Associate Dean of College of Education, National Taiwan Normal University
162, He-ping East Road, Section 1,
Taipei, Taiwan 10610
Reviewer 1

Comment 1.

It is a paper on an interesting topic, though I am not sure it is ideally suited to BMC Geriatrics. It may be more appropriate for a journal with more of a social sciences focus.

Response: Thank you for the advice.

According to its aims and scope, BMC Geriatrics is an open access journal publishing original peer-reviewed research articles on all aspects of the health and healthcare of older people [1]. Our study explored the perspectives about partnership among single older adults. A previous study indicated that unmarried older adults are at risk of poorer well-being compared to married older adults [2]; thus, we believe that BMC Geriatrics is the appropriate journal for our manuscript.

References

1. BMC Geriatrics: https://bmcgeriatr.biomedcentral.com/


Comment 2.

I admit to being confused by the statistics. Factor analysis has been performed on the participants' responses to a series of Q statements. I would have thought that this shows an underlying structure for the responses. However, the authors seem to treat the results as though the analysis has grouped the participants. I am puzzled that factor analysis would do this - it seems to me that another method would be required to cluster the participants. It may be that I am simply mistaken but I do find this confusing.
Response: Thank you for the advice.

Our study applied the Q Methodology. The focus of Q methodology is its emphasis on subjectivity as it seeks to understand the dimensions of phenomena from a perspective that is intrinsic to the individual, while using statistics to identify the differences and similarities among participants [1]. Although "Q" comes from the form of factor analysis used to analyze the data, it is different from the factor analysis of analyzing variances from the items included in a questionnaire. The Q methodology looks for correlations between participants across a sample of variables. Q factor analysis reduces the many individual viewpoints of the participants down to a few “factors,” that are claimed to represent shared ways of thinking. It is different from the usual factor analysis [2].

The Q-sort typically consists of a number of statements printed on small cards, which participants rank according to a “condition of instruction.” This act of ranking each statement in relation to others, rather than evaluating them individually, is designed to capture the way people think about ideas in relation to other ideas rather than in isolation [3]. By-person factor analysis identifies groups of participants who make sense of a pool of items in similar ways, giving the researcher access to a systematic and rigorous means of examining human subjectivity [4].

Our research team has already published research articles that applied the Q methodology in several well-known journals as follows [5-7].

References

1. Dennis KE. Q methodology: relevance and application to nursing research. ANS. 1986; 8: 6-17.


Comment 3.

The data are obtained from a sample of older people in Taiwan, recruited from a fairly limited range of community organisations, elderly apartment complexes and elderly care centres. We do not know even if this sample is typical of Taiwan, let alone anywhere else. There are no discussions of any limitations of the methods used, of which the biggest is surely whether these findings can be generalised to other communities. Another distinct possibility is that responses may have been affected by a desirability/respectability bias on behalf of the participants.

Response: Thank you for the advice.

Samples in studies employing Q methodology are carefully selected rather than randomized, in order that variability in a specific case or situation can be analyzed [1]. A Q methodology study supports the discovery of participants’ opinions about a topic. The number of participants recruited was based on the recommendation that there should be at least one participant for every three statements [2], and at least 14 participants when 40 statements form the Q set. Furthermore, the breadth and diversity of viewpoints is probably best achieved when a participant group contains between 40 and 60 participants [3]. The number of participants in Q methodology studies have ranged between 18-42 people [4-8]. Based on the suggestions of previous studies, our study with a sample size of 49 participants is acceptable.
References


7. Shabila NP, Al-Tawil NG, Al-Hadithi TS, Sondorp E. Using Q-methodology to explore people’s health seeking behavior and perception of the quality of primary care services. BMC Public Health. 2014; 14: 2. (n=40)

Comment 4.

The five factors cover just 53% of the variance, so this doesn't feel like a very strong explanation of the findings. Some of the factor titles, especially for Factor 1, appear weak, and it is difficult to tell what is the construct that is being described by the factor.

Response: Thank you for the advice.

The Q methodology combines both qualitative and quantitative research. Its aim is to understand and explore subjectivity. The explained variance in related studies ranged from 36% to 56% [1-4]. Therefore, the explained variance of 53% in our study was acceptable compared to that in previous studies.

References

1. Shabila NP, Al-Tawil NG, Al-Hadithi TS, Sondorp E. Using Q-methodology to explore people’s health seeking behavior and perception of the quality of primary care services. BMC Public Health. 2014; 14: 2. (Explained variance 36%)


Comment 5.

Finally, it is difficult to see what the implications are for practitioners. I am not sure that being aware of these factors will affect how health professionals interact with older people, including about how they seek new relationships.

Response: Thank you for the advice. The following paragraph was shown in P.18-19 (line 390-418).

For single older adults, establishing romantic relationships can reduce loneliness and improve their well-being. In the future, when developing assessment tools, the scale developed in our study can be used as a self-assessment reference for assessing self-reflection and self-recognition as well as shorten the time-consuming process of finding a partner and reduce the fear associated with it.

Healthcare providers should possess knowledge about needs assessment. Furthermore, for healthcare providers, understanding the diversity of partnerships between single older adults is important. In the future, when assessing the needs of older adults, our results would be helpful to provide advice, which will benefit the quality of health services. Moreover, our findings provide the basis for the future development of scales and APP, and help older adults looking for a partner with the adapted method, which is more efficient.

Reviewer: 2

Comments: The study has followed Q methodology method and is a clear description of what has been carried out. The authors have related the introduction and the method well. The specific difficulty is when there are comparisons or correlations made between the factor a person sorts to and one of their characteristics eg, age; being widowed living close to a partner. It is the statements that are being factor analysed not the participants. This does not negate much of the results or conclusions because the results are very valid anyway; to say that the views on the topic whilst different have got patterns; that if known can help professionals discuss with older people what their beliefs relating to wanting a partner and the benefit to them might be.

Requested revisions: As discussed above remove the aspects that relate to the qualities the participants might have because these links cannot be made and this is not the intention of Q it looks for subjectivity and explores this not correlations.
Additional requests:

I think this is an excellent paper and a lot of hard work has been put into it. Congratulations. For very minor adjustments this paper will inform the subject it explores. In the West loneliness is seen as a very important aspect of people's health and having insight into the relevance of what matters to older people in terms of having a new partner is valuable.

Response: Thank you for the advice.

1. We are not planning to make comparisons or correlations between the factors a participant sorts to and one of his/her characteristics. We would only like to provide a description of these perspectives’ socio-demographic features. We are sorry if we caused any misunderstanding.

2. In addition, we added the following paragraph to avoid misunderstandings. Please see P19 (line 412-418).

This study describes the attitudes of single older adults toward partnership in various categories. No comparisons or correlations were made between the factor a participant sorted to and one of his/her characteristics (e.g., age, being widowed, living close to a partner, etc.). In the future, when assessing the needs of older adults, our results would be helpful to provide advice, which will benefit the quality of health services. Moreover, our findings provide the basis for the future development of scales and APP, and help older adults looking for a partner with the adapted method, which is more efficient.

Editor Comments:

As a minor point, please update the part in the methods: This study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Blinded of Review.

Response: We have changed “Blinded of Review” into “National Taiwan University.” based on your suggestion.