Author’s response to reviews

Title: Searching for the optimal number of response alternatives for the distress scale of the Four Dimensional Symptom Questionnaire

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Author’s response to reviews:

To: Prof. M. Ragen

Editor-in-Chief of BMC psychiatry

Groningen, March 2018

Dear Professor Ragen,

We should be grateful if you would consider the enclosed manuscript “Searching for the optimal number of response alternatives for the distress scale of the Four Dimensional Symptom Questionnaire” for publication in Personality and Individual Differences.

In the current paper, we examined the effect of collapsing the three highest response alternatives of the items of the distress scale of the Four Dimensional Symptom Questionnaire (4DSQ) on important psychometric properties of the scale. In particular, we examined the effect of recoding the item scores on model fit, measurement precision along the latent distress continuum, and on
various indicators of construct-, convergent-, and predictive validity in order to get an indication on whether the current practice of recoding should be advocated or not.

The manuscript has not been published previously and is not being considered for publication elsewhere. There are no conflicts of interest.

Data from three samples are used in the current manuscript. The data of the first sample (N = 1017) were collected in between 2004 and 2011, and this data (next to another data set) was also used for the paper “Identifying levels of general distress in first line mental health services: can GP-and eHealth clients’ scores be meaningfully compared?” that was published last year in BMC Psychiatry.

Data comprising the second sample (N = 55) that were collected from 2003 - 2006 have not been used in publications until now. As has been stated in the Ethics approval and informed consent section of our manuscript, all participants provided informed consent that their data would be stored anonymously and be used exclusively for research purposes by signing an agreement at intake that contains regulations with regard to privacy code. Furthermore, all three data collections were in line with the contemporary regulations back then (i.e. Dutch Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act). So, when the data have been collected, there was no need for a local ethics committee to rule that our research would not require no formal ethics approval in our particular case, and thus, such a statement does not exist.

The third sample comprised data collected in between 2003 and 2006. This dataset was already used by Bakker et al. for their publication “Effectiveness of a Minimal Intervention for Stress-related mental disorders with Sick leave (MISS); study protocol of a cluster randomized controlled trial in general practice” published in 2006 by BMC Public Health (2006).

We hope that will convince you that a formal statement is not required in our case, and that the article thus can already be reviewed as it is.

We hope that you will consider this manuscript for publication.

Sincerely yours, on behalf of all co-authors,

Jan van Bebber