Reviewer’s report

Title: Important situations that capture moral distress in paediatric oncology

Version: 1 Date: 19 Dec 2019

Reviewer: Michael Kleinknecht-Dolf

Reviewer's report:

Dear authors

Thank you for revising the manuscript. In think, the manuscript gained a lot from the revision. I agree with the implementation of the suggestions. Thank you very much for the benevolent efforts you have made for this.

In my opinion, some points that seem important to me in relation with the development of a questionnaire are still not enough explicitly explained:

Background

In the background section, a statement about the conceptual model of measurement you followed is still missing:

According to Hamric, her MDS-R questionnaire is based on a reflective measurement model and its records moral distress as a symptom of certain causes (Hamric, Borchers, & Epstein, 2012). In connection with the further development of the MDS-R to the MMD-HP the authors stated again, that the questionnaire is based on a reflective measurement model (Epstein, Whitehead, Prompahakul, Thacker, & Hamric, 2019). Is the conception of your questionnaire still in line with this rationale (reflective measurement model for the latent variable moral distress)? In addition, if so, does there exists some hints, that the 21 items in whole does not sufficient asses the latent variable moral distress in the intended setting? Why was the augmentation of the questionnaire with this five items 22 to 26 necessaire to optimize the assessment of the latent variable moral distress?

You wrote, there is a 5-Point Likert response scale for both, the frequency as well as for the disturbance. In the light of the definition, that a Likert scale asses the degree of an agreement to a certain statement, the wording of the response scale of your questionnaire is not clear. Please can you explain more explicit the answer categories of your questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Proof of the psychometric properties of the translated and adapted Swedish MDS-R

To examine the questionnaire's reliability, the statistics of Cronbach's Alpha is described. As mentioned in the first review, Cronbach's Alpha alone is just one statistics to assess the psychometrics of a questionnaire. It is not a test for unidimensionality, its value may also be in an acceptable range by
multidimensional scales (Cortina, 1993). Consequently, the statistics of Cronbach's Alpha alone is not an indicator that it is reasonable, building a sum score out of the scores of the individual items. Perhaps, you have done some other statistics? If not, I think, this would be a limitation, which may be eliminated by future research.

Data Analysis

Algorithm for building a composite score and a total score

Thank you for incorporating the thought that as the frequency of experiencing a moral distressing situation increases, the disturbance may decrease due to a learning effect. This is an argument, that it is conceptually not plausible to form a composite score from the frequency and the disturbance by multiplication, which is then added up to an overall score that should represent the total disturbance. This algorithm is based on the assumption that a) people may assess frequency and disturbance separately from each other, and b) that the total disturbance always increases with the frequency of certain situations, respectively that many little distressing situations are conceptually and consequently mathematically the same as e.g. one situation, which is very disturbing (10 x 1 = 1 x 10). To my best knowledge, there exists no published theoretical foundation or empirical evidence for the accuracy of this equation.

In addition, the estimation of the frequency is just a "simple" report of the frequency, while the disturbance assessment (assuming a reflective measurement model) is an expression of the latent variable "moral distress". This are two different things.

In respect of this, it is plausible that Mary Corley, the original developer of the Moral Distress Scale (MDS), did not regularly analyzed the MDS item scores in this way. In its original form, the MDS only consisted of the disturbance scale (Corley, 1995; Corley, Elswick, Gorman, & Clor, 2001). She added the frequency scale later in connection with an additional research question. She examined whether there was a correlation between the disturbance score and the assessment of the quality of the ethical environment. Only in this context she described a composite score out of the frequency and the disturbance (Corley, Minick, Elswick, & Jacobs, 2005). As she continued to examine the psychometric properties of MDS, she found that the responses to frequency of occurrence and distress correlate little per item. She observed that there was a negative correlation between the disturbance and the age of the participants. She concluded that nurses also learn how to deal with morally distressing situations and strengthen their resilience (Corley et al., 2005).

Therefore, can you please describe the rationale for the approach that guided your analysis and construction of a composite score out of frequency and disturbance, which was summarized to an overall score? If there is none explicitly, since you have carried out this procedure in concordance with other authors, perhaps it may be a possibility, that you describe this guidance and discuss this procedure critically in the discussion section.

Reviewer conclusion

I recommend publishing this important and interesting work after a solution or discussion of the mentioned points. The manuscript describes interesting insights in moral distress in the intended setting and is an important contribution to the scientific knowledge about moral distress and its measurement. In my opinion, there are still some revisions or explications necessaire before it is ready to publish. I hope my comments will support doing this revision.
With kind regards.

Literature


Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

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