Translation and validation of the EORTC QLQ-CX24 questionnaire into the indigenous African languages of isiXhosa and Afrikaans

Du Toit GC, MBChB, MMed, FCOG/LKOG(SA), Part-Time Consultant
Unit of Gynaecological Oncology, Tygerberg Hospital, University of Stellenbosch
Nel DG, Part-Time Consultant
Centre for Statistical Consultation, University of Stellenbosch
Correspondence to: George du Toit, e-mail: dutoitg@worldonline.co.za

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Abstract

Objectives: Quality of life (QOL) assessment plays an important role in oncological clinical practice and research settings when evaluating treatment outcome. Cervical cancer remains a prevalent disease in South African women. The current study translated the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) cervical cancer module, QLQ-CX24, into isiXhosa and Afrikaans and validated the questionnaires.

Setting and subjects: The QLQ-CX24 was translated forwards into isiXhosa and Afrikaans and backwards into English, and then reconciled by four independent language practitioners. The translated version was completed by 15 isiXhosa- and 15 Afrikaans-speaking patients with cervical cancer. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, a measure of internal consistency of response, was calculated. The conversion validity was evaluated by assessing the correlation between each item and its scale. Discriminant validity was examined by comparing the correlation values of each item with other scales using Pearson’s and Spearman’s correlation coefficients.

Results: The translated isiXhosa and Afrikaans questionnaires demonstrated good conversion validity in the multi-item scales, with values of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient ≥ 7. Discriminant validity was demonstrated in the single-item questions. Patients completed the questionnaires in less than 20 minutes.

Conclusion: The translated isiXhosa and Afrikaans versions of QLQ-CX24 were successfully translated and validated and is available for research and clinical use.

Introduction

South Africa has a high incidence of cervical cancer (26.6/100 000) and disease-associated mortality (14.5/100 000). A previous study showed advanced stage of presentation in the majority of cases, with five-year survival of 35% in stage III disease. Advanced stage of disease at presentation results in considerable disease- and treatment-related morbidity. Quality of life (QOL) in patients afflicted by cancer has become a major determinant in deciding on treatment options and it has become an integral part of oncology practice and research. The European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) has a generic questionnaire (QLQ-30 version 3) that assesses the general quality of life of all cases of malignancy. A specific mode for cervical cancer (QLQ-CX24) has been developed and has been used in clinical research. The QLQ-30 is available in Afrikaans, isiXhosa and isiZulu, but the QLQ-CX24 questionnaire is not. The QLQ-CX24 consists of three multi-item scales and six single items that are not assessed by the core instrument (QLQ-30). Multi-items in QLQ-CX24 scales are symptom scales (questions 31-37, 39 and 41), body image (questions 45-47) and sexual and vaginal function (questions 50-53). The questionnaire allows for four options of response to each question (Table I).

Method

The English version of the questionnaire was translated into isiXhosa and Afrikaans according to the EORTC criteria. The original items were translated from English into isiXhosa and Afrikaans by two independent language practitioners through a process of forward translations, resolution and backward translation by
The validation of the translated questionnaire was carried out at the Unit of Gynaecological Oncology at Tygerberg Hospital. Ethics approval was obtained from the Faculty of Health Sciences (Number S11/10/008). Informed consent was obtained before enrolment. The translated questionnaires were completed by patients with cervical cancer. Upon completion of the questionnaire, they were given the opportunity to provide feedback on possible encountered problems. The study included 15 isiXhosa- and 15 Afrikaans-speaking patients. Mean and standard deviation for each scale (multi- and single items) were calculated. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, a measure of internal consistency of response, was used. A magnitude of ≥ 0.7 was considered to be acceptable. Correlation between items within the two language questionnaires was analysed using multi-trait scaling. The conversion validity was evaluated by assessing the correlation between each item and its scale. Discriminant validity was examined by comparing the correlation values of each item with other scales using Pearson’s and Spearman’s correlation coefficients.

**Results**

The mean age of the groups was 41.8 years (28-55) for the
isiXhosa group and 51.8 years (29-70) for the Afrikaans group. Of the total (30) participants, four were illiterate. Employment records showed that 13 were unemployed and 17 were involved in manual labour as an occupation, e.g. factory workers, farm labourers and petrol pump attendants. All of the participants were in the advanced stage of the disease and were being treated with radiotherapy. Completion of the questionnaires could be performed in less than 20 minutes. Of note was that only five isiXhosa and two Afrikaans patients answered the questions relating to sexual and vaginal function, reflecting a low incidence of sexual activity. All patients found the questionnaires to be acceptable. Correlation results of the multi-item scales and single items were performed using the tests for item convergent and discriminant validity. The isiXhosa results are shown in Table II. Internal consistency was satisfactory in all scales with Cronbach α > 0.70 (symptom experience 0.70, body image 0.76, sexual and vaginal functioning 0.83). The Afrikaans results are shown in Table III. The internal consistency was satisfactory in all scale with Cronbach α > 0.70 symptom experience 0.71, body image 0.85, sexual and vaginal functioning 0.96. Discriminant validity was determined by correlation coefficient and was satisfactory.

**Discussion**

South Africa has 11 officially recognised languages. The Western Cape province of South Africa, where the current study was carried out, has three official languages. Afrikaans (55.3%) is the spoken the most, followed by isiXhosa (23.7%) and English (19.3%). QOL assessment of the patients in their home language is of paramount importance so that optimal treatment-related decisions can be taken.

**Table II**: Multi-trait scaling analyses with Pearson correlations between scale items on cervical cancer module of the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer Quality of Life questionnaire for isiXhosa speakers

| Scale                        | Mean ± SD   | Cronbach α | Item-own scale correlation* | Item-other scale correlation |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Symptoms experienced (items 31-37, 39, 41-43) | 22.2 ± 5.52  | 0.70       | 0.13-0.62                   | 0.14-0.97                    |
| Body image (items 45-47)     | 6.13 ± 2.72  | 0.76       | 0.44-0.64                   | 0.3-0.96                     |
| Sexual/vaginal functioning (items 50-53) | 10 ± 4.66   | 0.83       | 0.32-0.98                   | 0.26-0.55                    |
| Lymphoedema (item 38)        | 6.93 ± 4.4   | NA         | NA                          | 0.04-0.85                    |
| Peripheral neuropathy (item 40) | 7.2 ± 4.58  | NA         | NA                          | 0.41-0.77                    |
| Menopausal symptoms (item 44) | 9.07 ± 5.34  | NA         | NA                          | 0.29-0.83                    |
| Sexual worry (item 48)       | 10.4 ± 5.62  | NA         | NA                          | 0.65-0.81                    |
| Sexual activity (item 49)    | 5.6 ± 2.53   | NA         | NA                          | 0.27-0.91                    |
| Sexual enjoyment (item 54)   | 2.13 ± 4.5   | NA         | NA                          | 0.04-0.66                    |

NA: not available, SD: standard deviation
* Corrected for overlap

**Table III**: Multi-trait analyses with Pearson correlations between scale items on cervical cancer module of the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer Quality of Life questionnaire for isiXhosa speakers

| Scale                        | Mean ± SD   | Cronbach α | Item-own scale correlation* | Item-other scale correlation |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Symptoms experienced (items 31-37, 39, 41-43) | 19.3 ± 3.67  | 0.71       | 0.26-0.53                   | 0.03-0.73                    |
| Body image (items 45-47)     | 4.86 ± 2.5   | 0.85       | 0.55-0.85                   | 0.44-0.94                    |
| Sexual/vaginal functioning (items 50-53) | 7 ± 4.24    | 0.96       | 0.99-1                      | 0.32-0.65                    |
| Lymphoedema (item 38)        | 5.87 ± 3.66  | NA         | NA                          | 0.38-0.86                    |
| Peripheral neuropathy (item 40) | 5.07 ± 2.38  | NA         | NA                          | 0.57-1                       |
| Menopausal symptoms (item 44) | 8 ± 4.54    | NA         | NA                          | 0.39-0.57                    |
| Sexual worry (item 48)       | 5.87 ± 3.66  | NA         | NA                          | 0.14-0.72                    |
| Sexual activity (item 49)    | 5.07 ± 3.20  | NA         | NA                          | 0.14-0.85                    |
| Sexual enjoyment (item 54)   | 1.33 ± 4.19  | NA         | NA                          | 0.27-0.86                    |

NA: not available, SD: standard deviation
* Corrected for overlap
Different translational approaches to medical questionnaires include the linguistic, text-linguistic and functionalist approaches. Unfortunately, professional translators are not always familiar with the terminology, colloquial language or literacy levels of the target audiences. The translation model that was used in the current study met most of the requirements with regard to medical questionnaires and has been described and proven in the current target population. In the current study, four patients were illiterate and the questions were read to them. Socio-economic status was reflected by the high unemployment rate of 43.3%. In the study group, the majority of employed patients were manual labourers. Guidelines to translations that do not consider the target audience's education level and literacy rate can lead to communication gaps, which can pose problems for medical researchers. This is particularly true of translations into the African languages, such as isiXhosa or colloquial Afrikaans that is spoken by the Cape coloureds (people of mixed ancestry through exogenous union or intermarriage, or those who are affiliated to Cape Muslims). The use of sophisticated medical terminology when referring to bodily functions such as "micturition", "defecation" and "coitus" can result in confusion and misunderstanding. Colloquial terms were used in these circumstances for completion of the study questionnaires.

Statistical analysis of the translated questions revealed acceptable conversion validity and discriminant validity in both isiXhosa and Afrikaans versions of the translation. The small number of respondents to the sexual scales was a possible limiting factor. In the current study, the high percentage (76%) of responders indicated that they were not sexually active. This is in keeping with previously reported figures from other studies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the translated isiXhosa and Afrikaans versions of the EORTC QLQ-CX24 questionnaire are a reliable and valid measure of the QOL of patients with cervical cancer. Our results indicate that this questionnaire could be used in clinical and epidemiological cancer research to study the QOL of isiXhosa- and Afrikaans-speaking patients with cervical cancer.

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