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Factor structure and longitudinal measurement invariance of PHQ-9 for specialist mental health care patients with persistent major depressive disorder: Exploratory Structural Equation Modelling

Boliang Guo\textsuperscript{a}, Catherine Kaylor-Hughes\textsuperscript{a}, Anne Garland\textsuperscript{b}, Neil Nixon\textsuperscript{b}, Tim Sweeney\textsuperscript{b}, Sandra Simpson\textsuperscript{c}, Tim Dalgleish\textsuperscript{f}, Rajini Ramana\textsuperscript{d}, Min Yang\textsuperscript{g}, Richard Morriss\textsuperscript{a}\textsuperscript{*}

\textsuperscript{a}CLAHRC-EM, School of Medicine, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom (Prof R Morriss MD, B Guo PhD, C Kaylor-Hughes DPhil)
\textsuperscript{b}Adult Mental Health Directorate, Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust, Nottingham, United Kingdom (A Garland, RMN, N Nixon, MD, T Sweeney RMN)
\textsuperscript{c}Nottinghamshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (Sandra Simpson)
\textsuperscript{d}Cambridge and Peterborough Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (R Ramana, MBBS)
\textsuperscript{f}Medical Research Council Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit, Cambridge (Prof T Dalgleish PhD)
\textsuperscript{g}West China School of Public Health, Sichuan University, PR China (Prof Min Yang)

\textsuperscript{*}Correspondence to: Professor Richard Morriss, Institute of Mental Health, University of Nottingham, Triumph Road, Nottingham, NG7 2TU, United Kingdom. Email: richard.morriss@nottingham.ac.uk

Abstract

Background
The Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) is a widely used instrument for measuring levels of depression in patients in clinical practice and academic research; its factor structure has been investigated in various samples, with limited evidence of measurement equivalence/invariance (ME/I) but not in patients with more severe depression of long duration. This study aims to explore the factor structure of the PHQ-9 and the ME/I between treatment groups over time for these patients.

Methods
187 secondary care patients with persistent major depressive disorder (PMDD) were recruited to a randomised controlled trial (RCT) with allocation to either a specialist depression team arm or a general mental health arm; their PHQ-9 score was measured at baseline, 3, 6, 9 and 12 months. Exploratory Structural Equational Modelling (ESEM) was performed to examine the factor structure for this specific patient group. ME/I between treatment arm at and across follow-up time were further explored by means of multiple-group ESEM approach using the best-fitted factor structure.

Results
A two-factor structure was evidenced (somatic and affective factor). This two-factor structure had strong factorial invariance between the treatment groups and across follow-up times.

Limitations
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