

The effects of item placement in the Young Schema Questionnaire short form

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There is conflicting evidence in the literature regarding the effect of item placement in questionnaires measuring psychological constructs. More specifically, whether randomizing or blocking questions together would produce a more reliable and valid measure. This issue is especially relevant for the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ). Originally created by Jeffery Young in 1990, it is an instrument used to measure early maladaptive schemas (EMS), a concept at the core of Schema Therapy. Earlier questionnaires were in a blocked format where each group of items related to a particular schema were clustered together. However a version of the short form of the YSQ (YSQ-SF2) randomly placed items belonging to each schema throughout. This was done without comparing the psychological properties between the two formats. It is an empirical question whether the items trigger the same response from people depending on the version.

## Method

In this study participants (103 nonclinical, 33 clinical) completed two versions of the Young Schema Questionnaire short form. The first study accessed a non-clinical population through an online survey site called SCORED (Social and Community Online Research Database). The second study utilised data that was collected as part of a larger research project which examined best treatment for patients with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). To isolate possible practice effects, all participants were randomly allocated as to which questionnaire they completed first, with

two weeks being the mean time in between completion. Due to advancements in psychometric methods, statistically sophisticated models could be applied to examine precisely how altered structures can change individual response patterns. This study utilised the Rasch model of measurement.

## Results

The two versions were not psychometrically equivalent and item placement caused a significantly different response. The version with items grouped had significantly more item response dependence in 13 out of 15 schemas. The blocked version had greater variability in responses and demonstrated more extreme person location means for the majority of the schemas.

## Discussion

This study adds to the literature on the psychometrics of the YSQ-SF2 by raising questions over changing the sequence of the items. This is especially pertinent as there is a third version of the YSQ-SF in global use, which does not place items in a grouped manner. There are potential therapeutic and empirical impacts. Clinically the patient's schemas may not be triggered and the randomized format could underestimate the value of the schema, leading the therapist to focus on the wrong area. Within the field of research the YSQ is being utilized to investigate the role of EMS with psychopathology, to explore relationships in a wide range of areas, such as attachment, addiction, occupational functioning and even as a benchmark to validate other measures. The current findings may have an effect on the outcomes already established. It is clear there is more work required on this questionnaire and it is possible that the Rasch method of measurement can assist in developing a new YSQ short form - version four.

Young, J. E. (1990). *Cognitive Therapy for Personality Disorders: A Schema-Focused Approach*.

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