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## LETTER TO THE EDITORS

# Ensuring clinical validity: the case for reconsidering ''several days'' in the PHQ-9 Brazilian version

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The Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), which assesses symptoms of depression, has been translated into over 100 languages and has seen widespread use since the early 2000s.[1] The Brazilian version was initially translated by Fraguas et al.[2] and was subsequently validated by several research teams. Osório et al.[3] were among the first to explore the validity of the PHQ-9 among Brazilian women. When describing the version used in their study, the authors refer to the version ''translated into Brazilian Portuguese by Pfizer, known in Brazil as the Questionário sobre a Saúde do Paciente – 9.''[3]

Subsequently, Santos et al.[4] validated the questionnaire among the general adult population in Brazil. During the pilot phase of the study, they found significant confusion among participants regarding the response options ''several days'' and ''more than half the days.'' As a result, the authors replaced the ''several days'' option with ''less than a week.'' It is therefore important to note that the version used by Osório et al.[3] differed from that used by Santos et al.[4]

More recent studies[5,6] have used the version translated by Fraguas et al.,[2] which retains the original ''several days'' response option despite evidence of potential misunderstanding. I argue that the most widely used version, currently available on the official PHQ-9 website and employing the ''several days'' response option, may not be fully comprehensible to its intended Brazilian population. This concern is motivated by my own clinical observation while working with Brazilian immigrants at Cambridge Health Alliance, a Harvard Medical School-affiliated hospital, where patients have expressed confusion regarding these response terms.

Although the word ''several'' is often translated into Brazilian Portuguese as *vários*,[7] these words differ in meaning, which may explain the confusion described by Santos et al.[4] According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, ''several'' is defined as ''more than two but fewer than many,''[8] whereas the word *vários* is commonly understood as the English equivalent of ''many'' or ''numerous.''[7] This subtle difference in meaning may compromise the accuracy of responses, particularly if used as a self-report measure, and underscores the importance of culturally sensitive translations in mental health assessment tools.

In light of these observations, it is important that researchers and clinicians consider the need to culturally adapt the PHQ-9 for Brazilian populations. Ensuring clarity in response options is essential for accurate assessment and effective clinical care. Further research is warranted to explore alternative translations that may improve comprehension and, ultimately, the validity of the PHQ-9 as a depression screening tool among Brazilian patients.

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### Disclosure

The author reports no conflicts of interest.

### Data availability statement

Not applicable.

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