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Empirical evidence for an invariant three-factor structure of the Parental Bonding Instrument in six European countries

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Abstract

The objective of the present study was to test the Parental Bonding Instrument's (PBI) three-factor structure (care, overprotection, and authoritarianism) found by Cox et al. (2000) [Cox, B.J., Enns, M.W., Clara, I.P. 2000, The Parental Bonding Instrument: confirmatory evidence for a three-factor model in a psychiatric clinical sample and in the National Comorbidity Survey, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 35 (2000) 353–357.] on an eight-item short form of the scale. A total of 8813 respondents from the six European countries participating in the ESEMeD project (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, and Spain) completed either the PBI-paternal or the PBI-maternal scale. Maximum likelihood confirmatory factor analysis was used to compare the original factor model of Cox et al. with a three-factor solution that emerged from an exploration of the structure with principal component factor analysis. When gender and age subgroups, as well as different countries, were taken into account, the accuracy of the model was confirmed. The fit indices for the new model indicated a generally better model fit than the ones for the model originally developed by Cox et al. Further efforts should be directed to the modeling of the dimension authoritarianism. The results provide the opportunity to estimate the influence of the

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extracted factors on mental disorders in different countries. The application of the short form of the PBI seems suitable primarily for large epidemiological studies.

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1. Introduction

There has long been interest in the relationships between parental child-rearing behaviours and mental disorders, perhaps reflecting the assumption that the occurrence of mental disorders might be influenced by various parental child-rearing styles. With their Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), Parker et al. (1979) developed a self-report questionnaire that provided researchers with an easy-to-use tool with good psychometric properties. The PBI consists of 25 items to be assessed separately for mother and father, measuring parental styles as remembered by the respondents during their first 16 years. Originally, the PBI was intended to measure the two parental styles of overprotection and care, dividing child-rearing styles into the following four categories: “high care-low control”, “high care-high control”, “low care-low control” and “low care-high control” or, reworded, “affectionless control”. Over the years, there has been growing evidence that overprotection is best conceived of as two separate dimensions of overprotection and authoritarianism, resulting in general agreement on a three-factor structure of the PBI.

Sato et al. (1999), investigating a nonclinical sample of 418 employed adults, and Cox et al. (2000), using a clinical sample of 283 adult psychiatric outpatients, compared the original two-factor model of Parker et al. with four different three-factor models developed by Cubis et al. (1989), Gomez-Beneyto et al. (1993), Kendler (1996) and Murphy et al. (1997). Using confirmatory factor analysis, both groups of authors found the 16-item based three-factor model by Kendler provided the best fit to the data. Further, the results of Sato et al. indicated a significantly poorer fit of the original two-factor model of Parker et al. than that provided by the four three-factor solutions. This conclusion was not so clearly supported by Cox et al., who presented another three-factor model based on a newly developed eight-item short form of

the PBI-paternal and PBI-maternal scales, which was included in the National Comorbidity Study (Neale et al., 1994; Mickelson et al., 1997). This model had a good fit for the PBI-paternal and PBI-maternal scales.

Both the model provided by Kendler (1996) and the more recently developed model of Cox et al. (2000) proved to be relatively invariant to sex and age effects. Despite the fact that the three-factor structure of the PBI has been used in studies carried out in different countries and cultural settings, no study has yet systematically used a suitable data set to analyse the invariance of the factor structure of the PBI in different cultures.

The European Study of the Epidemiology of Mental Disorders (ESEMED) was designed to estimate the prevalence of mental disorders, the burden of disease and the use of services in six European countries. It was carried out in representative samples of the adult population of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, and Spain. The study included an 11-item short form of the PBI, which included all eight items used by Cox et al. Thus, the primary aim of this work is to examine the model of Cox et al. plus a newly developed model with regard to the invariance of the factor structure between the six countries. A further aim is to determine the factor model with the best adaptation to the data, taking into consideration the invariance of the single models with regard to the different age groups and sex.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

The ESEMED project is based on a cross-sectional, stratified, multi-stage random sample that contains data on 21,425 adult respondents (aged 18 years and older) who were living in non-institutional settings in six European countries (Belgium, $n=2419$; France,

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