



Brief report: Assessing dispositional optimism in adolescence – Factor structure and concurrent validity of the Life Orientation Test – Revised



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A B S T R A C T

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Validity

Dispositional optimism is an individual difference promoting psychosocial adjustment and well-being during adolescence. Dispositional optimism was originally defined as a one-dimensional construct; however, empirical evidence suggests two correlated factors in the Life Orientation Test – Revised (LOT-R).

The main aim of the study was to evaluate the dimensionality of the LOT-R. This study is the first attempt to identify the best factor structure, comparing congeneric, two correlated-factor, and two orthogonal-factor models in a sample of adolescents. Concurrent validity was also assessed.

The results demonstrated the superior fit of the two orthogonal-factor model thus reconciling the one-dimensional definition of dispositional optimism with the bi-dimensionality of the LOT-R. Moreover, the results of correlational analyses proved the concurrent validity of this self-report measure: optimism is moderately related to indices of psychosocial adjustment and well-being.

Thus, the LOT-R is a useful, valid, and reliable self-report measure to properly assess optimism in adolescence.

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Scheier and Carver (1985) defined dispositional optimism as a generalized expectancy of positive future outcomes. Optimism plays an important role in the self-regulation of behavior (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Specifically, empirical evidence has highlighted its relevant role in influencing adaptive behaviors and psychological adjustment during adolescence. Compared to pessimists, more optimistic adolescents report: higher levels of psychological and subjective well-being (Lai, 2009; Vacek, Coyle, & Vera, 2010; Wong & Lim, 2009), more adaptive health-related behavior (Jones, DeMore, Cohen, O'Connell, & Jones, 2008), higher self-esteem (Weber, Puskar, & Ren, 2010), lower levels of stress and negative events (Huan, Yeo, Ang, & Chong, 2006; Orejudo, Puyuelo, Fernandez-Turrado, & Ramos, 2012), less depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation (Murberg, 2012), and lower levels of anger (Puskar, Sereika, Lamb, Tusaie-Mumford, & McGuinness, 1999). Given this importance, it is critical to reliably and validly assess levels of optimism among adolescents.

Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994) developed the Life Orientation Test – Revised (LOT – R) to assess dispositional optimism. It is a self-report measure consisting of 10 items. Three items (1, 4, and 10) are positively worded, three (3, 7, and 9) are negatively worded, and four are fillers. The factor structure of the LOT-R have been examined especially in samples of middle-aged adults. Controversy and strong debate have arisen regarding its dimensionality and construct validity. Specifically, there

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is an incongruence between the one-dimensional conceptualization of optimism and the dual-factor structure of the LOT-R usually reported in several studies. In fact, empirical evidence has suggested that the LOT-R is not unidimensional, but rather a two correlated-factor (2CF) model generally has a better fit than the single bipolar-factor model. This strong incongruence suggests a lack of construct validity of the LOT-R because the operationalization of optimism does not reflect its true theoretical conceptualization. However, three recent studies assessing the dimensionality of the LOT-R in samples of adults have demonstrated that the bi-factorial structure is an artifact of item wording; thus, the unidimensionality of optimism could be retained when a response style is introduced into the model (Alessandri et al., 2010; Cariou, Raufaste, & Vautier, 2003; Rauch, Schweizer, & Moosbrugger, 2007). This two orthogonal-factor (2OF) model reconciles the one-dimensional definition of optimism with the two dimensions of the LOT-R: the first factor, loaded by all of the items, measures optimism; whereas the second, loaded only by the three positively worded items, represents a response style factor.

Although the superior fit of the 2OF model has been demonstrated in adults, no studies have evaluated its appropriateness in samples of adolescents. Thus, there is no strong evidence regarding the dimensionality of the LOT-R in adolescence. Moreover, a study by Herzberg, Glaesmer, and Hoyer (2006) found that age moderates the association between optimism (i.e., positively worded items) and pessimism (i.e., negatively worded items): with increasing age, they become more independent of each other. This age-related difference in the correlation matrix of the items may also lead to an age-related difference in the factor structure of the LOT-R. Consequently, it's useful to evaluate the 2OF model and its generalizability in adolescence.

The current study

Main aim of the study was to assess the dimensionality of the LOT-R in a sample of adolescents. The congeneric, 2CF, and 2OF models – shown in Fig. 1 – were compared to identify the best factor structure using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Moreover, a second aim was to evaluate the concurrent validity of the LOT-R. We considered relationships between factor scores of optimism and several concurrent measures of both positive (i.e., self-esteem, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, positive affect) and negative outcomes (i.e., negative affect, depressive symptoms, engagement in violent actions, physical and verbal aggression). We hypothesized that optimism would be positively related to positive outcomes and negatively associated with negative outcomes.

Method

Participants and procedure

The sample was composed of 698 Italian adolescents (Male = 339), ranging in age from 15 to 19 years. Mean age was 17.25 (SD = 1.10) years old. Participants met during sessions in local schools, signed informed consent forms, and filled in self-report questionnaires. Parental consent was obtained for minors.

Dispositional optimism was assessed with the LOT-R (Scheier et al., 1994). Self-esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; Cronbach's Alpha = .86). Life satisfaction was measured with the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Cronbach's Alpha = .86). Positive and negative affect were evaluated using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; Cronbach's Alpha: for positive affect = .80; for negative affect = .85). Psychological well-being was assessed with a 36-item version of the Psychological Well-Being Scales (Steca, Ryff, D'Alessandro, & Delle Fratte, 2002), which taps six dimensions: environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth, self-acceptance, and positive relations (Cronbach's Alpha are respectively: .77, .70, .48, .75, .82, and .75). Depressive symptoms were assessed with the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977; Cronbach's Alpha = .90). Engagement in violent actions was evaluated with a measure developed by Caprara, Mazzotti, and Prezza (1990;

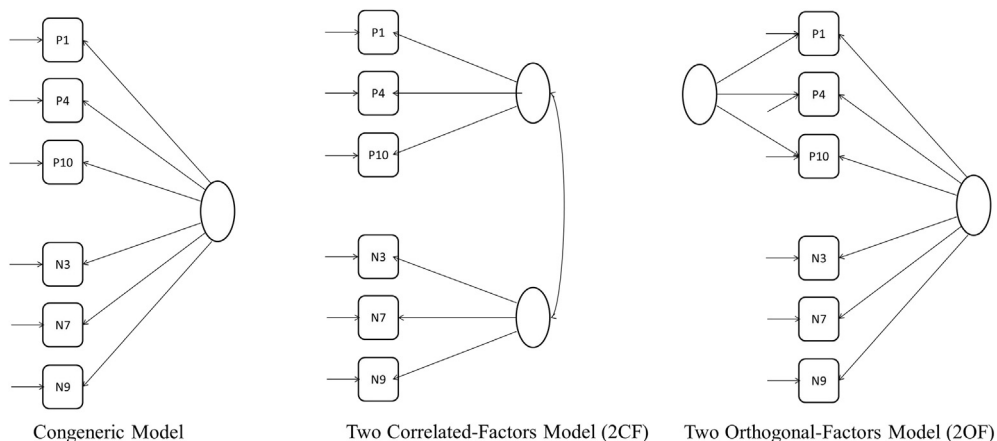


Fig. 1. Alternative tested models for the LOT-R.

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