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Perceived Control of Internal States and Wellbeing

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Abstract

Recent studies suggest that perceived control of the emotional impact of a stressful event may be just as important as the perception that control of the event is possible. This study explored the importance of perceived control of internal states in psychological wellbeing using a general community sample (*N*=439). Scores on the Perceived Control of Internal States scale (PCOISS) showed moderate, positive correlations with a number of wellbeing measures (Satisfaction with Life scale *r*=.37, Positive Affect scale *r*=.55), and negative correlations with the Negative Affect scale (*r*=-.57) and Perceived Stress scale (*r*=-.58). The strength of these correlations was similar to that obtained using the Mastery scale. The results of this study provide confirmation of previous research findings concerning the important role that perceived control plays in psychological wellbeing.

Perceived Control of Internal States and Wellbeing

One of the key developments within the psychological literature on control has been the growing recognition of the multidimensional nature of the control construct. Early studies defined control only in terms of the availability of the means to influence an aversive situation or outcome (Pervin, 1963). Studies over the last fifteen years, however, have explored control in more realistic, naturally occurring environments (Taylor, 1983; Thompson, Nanni, & Levine, 1994) and have recognised the importance of individual perceptions (Thompson & Spacapan, 1991). [section continues]

There were two major aims of this study:

(a) to explore the relationship between perceived control of internal states (as measured by the PCOISS) and psychological wellbeing (as measured by the Satisfaction with Life scale, the Positive Affect scale, the Negative Affect scale and the Perceived Stress scale); and (b) to compare the strength of the relationships with wellbeing, obtained for the PCOISS and the Mastery scale.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 439 adults, ranging in age from 18 to 82 years (*M*=37, *SD*=13). Forty-two per cent of the sample were males, 58 per cent were females. Fifty-eight per cent of participants were either married or living with a partner, 24% were single. [section continues]

Materials

Each questionnaire booklet contained a number of validated scales and demographic questions. Respondents were asked to provide details of their gender, age, marital status and educational level. Details of the scales included in the booklet are provided below.

Perceived Control of Internal States scale. The PCOISS (Pallant, 2000) is an 18-item scale designed to measure respondents' perceptions of their ability to control their internal states and to moderate the impact of aversive events on their emotions, thoughts and physical wellbeing. According to the author (Pallant, 2000) the PCOISS has good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha=.92) and adequate test-retest reliability (.89 over a two-week period).

Positive and Negative Affect Scales. The PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) consists of two separate 10-item subscales, Positive Affect (PA) and Negative Affect (NA). Respondents are provided with a list of emotions (interested, enthusiastic, irritable, ashamed) and are required to indicate how they felt over the last week using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very slightly*) to 5 (*extremely*). Internal consistency of both scales is reported as high (range =.84–.90) with adequate test–retest reliability (Watson et al., 1988). In this study the Cronbach's alpha for the PA and NA scales was .89 and .88, respectively. Watson et al. reported support for the convergent validity of the PANAS, with both scales correlating, as predicted, with other adjustment measures.

Procedure

Students enrolled in a research subject at Monash University were asked to distribute questionnaire booklets to their friends, family and acquaintances. Each

potential participant was provided with a package containing an explanatory statement, the questionnaire booklet and a reply-paid envelope. Participation in the study was voluntary and all questionnaires were completed anonymously. [section continues]

Results

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to explore the relationship between scores on the PCOISS and a number of measures of wellbeing (Satisfaction with Life scale, Positive Affect scale, Negative Affect scale, Perceived Stress scale). Preliminary analyses revealed no violations of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. The PCOISS showed moderate to strong correlations, in the expected direction, with each of the wellbeing measures (see Table 1).

The strongest correlation for the PCOISS was with the Perceived Stress scale: $r(425) = -.58$, $p < .001$. The PCOISS showed a similar pattern of correlations with measures of wellbeing, as those obtained for the Mastery scale (see Table 1).

Figure 1 shows the PCOISS scores for males and females across five age groups.

[section continues]

Discussion

The results of this study provide confirmation of previous research findings concerning the important role that perceived control plays in psychological wellbeing. Respondents with high levels of perceived control of their internal states reported higher levels of life satisfaction and positive affect, and lower levels of negative affect and perceived stress. [section continues]

References

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Footnotes

1. The PCOISS was developed as part of a multidimensional, multidomain inventory. Copies of this inventory can be obtained from the author.

Table 1

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations of the PCOISS and Mastery Scale with Measures of Wellbeing and Maladjustment

Scale	PCOISS [a]	Mastery scale [b]
Satisfaction with Life scale	.37 **	.44 ***
Positive Affect scale	.55 ***	.43 ***
Negative Affect scale	-.57 ***	-.46 ***
Perceived Stress scale	-.58 ***	-.61 ***

Note. PCOISS=Perceived Control of Internal States Scale.

[a] $n = 425$. [b] $n = 410$.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

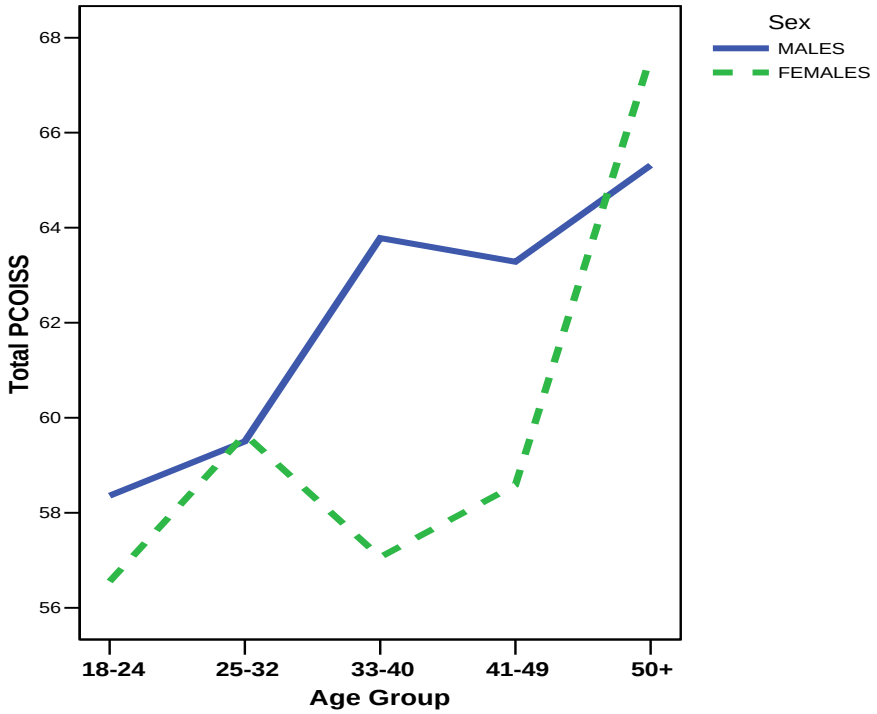

Figure 1. Comparison of PCOISS scores for males and females across five age groups.