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Psychometric Properties and Factor Structure of the Inventory of Personality Organization for Adolescents

Abstract

Despite general agreement that personality disorders (PDs) have their roots in childhood and adolescence, diagnosing PDs in adolescence remains a topic of debate. Reluctance to diagnose PDs in youth has been supported by the paucity of adapted measures of adolescent personality and by findings suggesting that a PD diagnosis may be less stable and reliable in adolescence. However, despite the reported instability of categorically defined diagnoses, there is increasing evidence that early maladaptive personality traits are both stable and predictive of future personality functioning. A more dimensional approach for the assessment of personality pathology in adolescence as well as new assessment measures are thus needed. The aim of this study was to examine the psychometric properties of the adolescent version of the Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-A), a measure that allows both a categorical and dimensional approach to personality assessment. Moreover, potential differences between adolescents and young adults regarding specific dimensions of personality organization were investigated, namely identity diffusion, primitive defenses, reality testing, aggression, and moral functioning. Participants included 530 adolescents ($M = 16$ years old) and 427 young adults ($M = 22$ years old) from the community. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses suggest that the IPO-A is a valid and reliable ($\alpha = .94$) instrument for assessing personality functioning in adolescents. Adolescents also reported significantly higher scores on all five dimensions, indicating more severe identity disturbance; greater use of primitive defenses; more impaired reality testing; more aggression; and poorer moral functioning than adults. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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Empirical Typology of Adolescent Personality Organization

Abstract

The concept of personality organization (PO) is central to current psychodynamic understanding of normal personality development as well as the development of personality disorders (PDs), their severity, and their treatment. However, individual differences in PO have primarily been studied in adult populations, and it remains unclear whether normal, neurotic and borderline PO can be distinguished during adolescence. With the growing support for the utility of diagnosing PDs in adolescence, this study aimed to examine whether the three levels of PO described in adults could similarly be identified in a community sample of adolescents, and how these levels of PO were related to measures of functioning and symptomatology. In addition, we wanted to further establish the validity and utility of the adolescent version of the Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-A), by identifying cut-off points for each of the main dimensions of Normal, Neurotic, and Borderline PO. Participants included 530 adolescents ($M = 16$ years old) from the community. Cluster analysis identified three levels of PO corresponding to Normal, Neurotic, and Borderline PO. Adolescents with a Borderline PO showed the lowest levels of functioning and the highest levels of psychopathology, compared to those with a Neurotic and Normal PO. ROC curve analyses suggested that Primitive Defenses, Identity Diffusion, Reality Testing, Aggression, and Moral Functioning were excellent predictors of adolescent PO. Cut-off points between the different POs were thus successfully established. The study findings suggest that PO may be a useful way of thinking about normal and pathological personality development in adolescents.