



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Adaptation process and psychometric properties of the Brazilian version



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**Abstract** This study aimed to present the validation process and the psychometric properties of the Brazilian version of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ). Participants were a nationwide sample of 3020 subjects aged 18–91 years old, from 22 different Brazilian states. Exploratory factor analysis supported a two-factor solution (presence of meaning – MLQ-P; and search for meaning – MLQ-S). Adequate reliability indexes were achieved. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) provided evidence that the MLQ-P and MLQ-S scales present better goodness-of-fit indexes when evaluated separately. Multiple group CFA achieved full measurement and structural invariance for gender and age (youngsters, adults and the elderly) groups. Group comparisons were conducted for evaluating gender, age and marital status differences in both MLQ-P and MLQ-S scales. The results are presented and discussed based on the literature. Our results suggest that the MLQ is a reliable measurement to evaluate presence and search for meaning in life in the Brazilian population in a wide variety of age groups.

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

Sentido de vida;  
Cuestionario;  
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Análisis factorial  
confirmatorio  
multigrupo

### Cuestionario de Sentido de Vida: proceso de adaptación y propiedades psicométricas de la versión brasileña

**Resumen** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo presentar los procedimientos de validación y las propiedades psicométricas de la versión brasileña del Cuestionario de Sentido de Vida (CSV). La recolección de los datos fue realizada a nivel nacional, y la muestra estuvo compuesta por 3020 sujetos con edades entre los 18 y los 91 años, provenientes de diferentes estados brasileños. Un análisis factorial exploratorio dio soporte a la solución de dos factores (presencia de

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sentido – CSV-P; y búsqueda por sentido – CSV-B) con adecuados índices de fiabilidad. El análisis factorial confirmatorio (AFC) demostró evidencias de que las escalas CSV-P y CSV-B presentan mejores índices de ajuste cuando son evaluadas por separado. Los AFCs multigrupo demostraron invariancia de medida e invariancia estructural completas para género y edad (jóvenes, adultos y ancianos). Fueron realizadas comparaciones entre grupos para evaluar las diferencias considerando género, edad y estado civil en las escalas (CSV-P y CSV-B). Los resultados son presentados y discutidos con base en la literatura. Nuestros resultados sugieren que el CSV es una medida fiable para evaluar la presencia y búsqueda de sentido de vida en la población brasileña y puede ser usada en una amplia variedad de grupos etarios.

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Meaning in life (MIL) may be defined as the extent to which people comprehend and see significance in their lives, as well as the degree wherein they perceive themselves to have a purpose or overarching aim in life (Steger, 2009). Decades of research have provided empirical evidence that MIL plays an important role in the human positive functioning. For example, MIL is positively associated with psychological and subjective well being, and quality of life (Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010), self-esteem (Schlegel, Hicks, King, & Arndt, 2011), hope (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005), optimism (Ho et al., 2010); self-efficacy (DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009), among others.

Regarding physical and mental health, studies have, for example provided evidence that MIL is an important component in the recovery of victims of serious illness, such as cord injury (Thompson, Coker, Krause, & Henry, 2003), and that it presented a mediational role between the relation of negative reminiscence with psychological distress (depression and anxiety) among older adults with mild to moderate depressive symptoms (Korte, Cappeliez, Bohlmeijer, & Westerhof, 2012).

To the same extent that the presence of MIL has being presented as an important indicator of human positive functioning, absence of meaning also has negative consequences. Lack of MIL is related to higher levels of neuroticism (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992), perceived stress (Bauer-Wu & Farran, 2005), negative affect (Debats, van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993), depression (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005), suicidal ideation (Edwards & Holden, 2001), etc. Considering this evidence, MIL is currently recognized as a formative marker of human positive functioning (Steger & Shin, 2010).

Another aspect related to meaning in life is the 'search for meaning' construct. In the initial psychological literature regarding meaning in life, search for meaning was considered a daily need, originated from an intrinsic human motivation, called "will to meaning" (Frankl, 1963). According to Frankl (1963, 1978), the search for meaning should be a never-ceasing motivation. Every time an individual achieves their ambitions new life goals tend to arise, leaving one always future-oriented, searching for new achievements and new meanings for the existence. Although in recent years there has been a growing interest on MIL, the construct 'search for meaning' was almost overlooked in the literature (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008b).

Search for meaning has been studied primarily in the context of responses to negative stressful events (Skaggs & Barron, 2006), such as HIV contamination (Bloom, 2008);

changes in the work context (Guevara & Ord, 1996); neoplastic diseases (Lee, 2008); familiar loses (Chan & Chan, 2011); marital problems (Farghadani, Navabinejad, & Shafiabady, 2010), among others. These studies have provided evidence that searching (and finding or believing in) a positive meaning to a stressful situation can booster the adaptation process, thus resulting in resilient responses.

Initially, search for meaning was understood as a positive construct, regardless of whether the subject was experiencing or not a risk situation (Frankl, 1978). However, other authors have suggested that search for meaning occurred only in people who have had their needs frustrated (Baumeister, 1991). To Baumeister (1991), people search for meaning when they do not perceive meaning in their lives or when they are going through stressful life events (e.g., death of spouse) that require new adjustment and re-elaboration of their existence through the pursuit of new "structures of meaning". On the other hand, a third approach (Reker, 2000) suggests that both possibilities are plausible, so that the construct search for meaning would be anchored by both a life-affirming and deficit-based perspective (Reker, 2000).

In cases of people who are not facing negative situations, search for meaning has proved to be mostly negative. Search for meaning presented positive correlations with fear ( $r = .25, p < .005$ ), shame ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ), sadness ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ), neuroticism ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ) and depression ( $r = .36, p < .005$ ) and negative correlations with psychological well-being (environmental mastery,  $r = -.23, p < .05$ ; relatedness,  $r = -.28, p < .001$ ; and self-acceptance,  $r = -.36, p < .001$ ). However, when considering people with a high sense of meaning in life (high levels of presence of meaning), search for meaning proved to be a positive variable, presenting positive correlations with life satisfaction and happiness, and negative correlations with depression ( $r$  values not presented; Park, Park, & Peterson, 2010).

All these empirical evidence show how important MIL and search for meaning are, and how it is necessary to have reliable instruments to assess these constructs. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) was developed with the aim of adequately assessing the constructs presence of meaning and search for meaning. Throughout three studies, the authors presented the development, evaluation, refinement and psychometric properties of the MLQ (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). The final version of the MLQ is composed of ten items, five tapping out the construct presence of meaning, and five the construct search for meaning. This 10-item version achieved acceptable fit and

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