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Decision-making style among adolescents: Relationship with sensation seeking and locus of control

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Abstract

The principal aim of the study was to examine the psychometric properties and construct validity of the General Decision-Making Scale (GDMS) in a sample of 700 adolescents (aged 15–19 years). Confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses provide evidence for a solid five-dimension structure reflecting the theorized construct: rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant and spontaneous. No differences were found with respect to gender; however older adolescents used more rational decision-making style than younger ones and had lower mean scores on intuitive, avoidant and spontaneous scales. Correlations between GDMS and both Sensation Seeking and Locus of Control scales provided substantiation for the convergent validity. Higher school achievements were positively associated with a rational decision-making style while the number of absences from school was positively related to spontaneous and avoidant styles. Data encourage the use of GDMS not only in the research of personality but for educational and counseling purposes.

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Keywords: Adolescence; Decision-making style; Sensation seeking; Locus of control

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Introduction

The developmental stage of adolescence is very relevant for studying decision-making competence. Some decisions made during adolescence, for example university choice or the involvement in some addictive behaviours, can have relevant consequences for the whole life of the individual (Tuinstra, Sonderen, Groothoff, van den Heuvel, & Post, 2000). Although adolescence is a crucial stage in which new unsupervised and risky contexts ask the adolescent to decide on his own and to experience the consequences of his decisions (Baillie, Lovato, Johnson, & Kalaw, 2005; D'Alessio, Baiocco, & Laghi, 2006) relatively few studies investigated the relevance of decision-making in this developmental phase (Crone, Vendel, & van der Molen, 2003; Tuinstra et al., 2000). Decision-making engages many cognitive processes such as information gathering and processing, problem solving, judgement, memory and learning. Evidence suggests that many adolescents by the age of 15 demonstrate the ability to make correct choices; further they have the capacity for creative problem solving and they are able to understand the phases involved in systematic decision-making. They also demonstrate a better personal control and responsibility for choices, identifying a larger range of risks and benefits (Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989). Miller and Byrnes (2001) defined decision-making as the process of choosing between different alternatives while in the midst of pursuing one's goal. Several researchers have focused their attention on the relation between personality and decision-making. These models suggested the existence of different typologies of decision-making style (Brew, Hesketh, & Taylor, 2001; Franken & Muris, 2005). Decision-making style has been defined as an individual's typical model of interpreting and responding to decision-making tasks (Driver, 1979; Harren, 1979). Through decision-making style, we have a way to understand why a person, while facing apparently identical situations, uses such different decision processes (Nutt, 1990). According to Harren's model, one of the most studied in literature, there are three different styles: rational (making decisions using rationality), dependent (making decisions by means of other's opinion and expectations) and intuitive (making decisions based on feelings and emotions). Phillips, Paziienza, and Ferrin (1984) added the avoidant style (the tendency to avoid or postpone decision-making) to Harren's model of decision-making. Rowe and Mason (1987) identified four decision styles, based on cognitive complexity and values orientation: behavioural (sociable and friendly), conceptual (insightful, adaptive and flexible), analytical (intellectual and control-oriented) and directive (practical, authoritarian and power-oriented). Mann et al. (1989) proposed five different decision-making styles: self-confident (the individual is optimistic and confident about his/her own decisions), vigilant (the individual carefully considers all the options before making decisions), panicked (the individual expresses anxiety and stress in the decision-making process), evasive (the individual tends to procrastinate decisions) and complacent (the individual can't solve situations and follows others). These styles can be classified into two categories: adaptive (self-confidence and vigilance) and maladaptive (panic, evasiveness and complacency) decision-making styles. Although Harren (1979) and several authors (Chartrand, Rose, Elliott, Marmarosh, & Caldwell, 1993; Mau & Jepsen, 1992) suggested that rational decision-making style is an ideal style, others have indicated that the efficacy of a particular decision-making style depends on context, cultural and personal variables as well as on the particular decision-making tasks required (career decision, university choice, particular kinds of problem solving, etc.) (Mau, 1995). Driver, Brousseau, and Hunsaker (1990) defined different decision-making styles based on the quantity of information used and on the number of options considered. Scott and Bruce (1995) defined

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