



A Danish version of the Sensation Seeking Scale and its relation to a broad spectrum of behavioral and psychological characteristics

Caroline P.L. Ripa^a, Henrik Skovdahl Hansen^{a,b}, Erik Lykke Mortensen^{a,c,*},
Stephanie A. Sanders^d, June Machover Reinisch^{a,d}

^a*Danish Epidemiology Science Center, Institute of Preventive Medicine, Copenhagen University Hospital, Oster Farimagsgade 5, 1399 Copenhagen K, Denmark*

^b*Danish Psychological Publishers, Copenhagen, Denmark*

^c*Department of Health Psychology, Institute of Public Health, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark*

^d*The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA*

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Abstract

The primary purpose of the present study was to evaluate the internal consistency and construct validity of the Danish translation of Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS). The secondary aim was to extend the range of psychological variables and behaviors that have been related to sensation seeking. The sample consisted of 691 subjects (363 males and 328 females) with a mean age of 31.7 years. The internal consistency of the scales was evaluated by coefficient alpha and intercorrelations among the five scales derived from the SSS were computed. Information on other variables was collected through standardized tests as well as questionnaires and interviews developed especially for this study. The results showed that the Danish SSS is a psychometrically sound instrument and revealed the relationship between sensation seeking and a broad spectrum of psychological traits and behaviors: socioeconomic status, academic achievement, intelligence, personality, smoking, alcohol and drug use, sexuality, driving and public transportation violations, and leisure time activities. Thus, this study confirmed and expanded the findings of many previous studies, while the results supported the validity of the Danish SSS and corroborated the usefulness of the concept of sensation seeking. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Sensation seeking; Gender differences; Personality; Sexuality; Construct validity; SES; Intelligence; Cross-cultural comparison

* Corresponding author. Danish Epidemiology Science Center, Institute of Preventive Medicine, Copenhagen University Hospital, Oster Farimagsgade 5, 1399 Copenhagen K, Denmark. Tel.: +45-3338-3750; fax: +45-3338-3757.

E-mail address: lykke@ipm.hosp.dk (E.L. Mortensen).

1. Introduction

Sensation seeking was first conceptualized by Zuckerman (1979). It is based on the idea that different individuals have different optimal levels of stimulation or arousal. Sensation seeking has been defined as “the seeking of varied, novel, complex and intense sensations and experiences”. It also entails a “willingness to take physical, social, legal and financial risks for the sake of such experience” (Zuckerman 1994, p. 27). Since its origin, the concept has gained increasing popularity and consequently Zuckerman’s Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) has been translated into many languages. The most widely used form of the SSS is form V (Zuckerman, 1979, 1994). It was translated into Danish as part of the Prenatal Development Project; a Danish large-scale study on the effects of prenatal exposure to prescribed maternal medications (Reinisch, Mortensen & Sanders, 1993; Reinisch, Sanders, Mortensen & Rubin, 1995).

Linguistic considerations are often a primary concern when personality scales are translated (cf. backtranslation procedures). However, the goal of most translations is to obtain instruments in the target language with the same psychometric characteristics as the original version (Simonsen & Mortensen, 1990). Consequently, it is important to investigate the psychometric properties of translated personality scales. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to evaluate the psychometric characteristics of the Danish version of the SSS and to evaluate the cross-cultural applicability of the construct of sensation seeking.

Establishing the construct validity of a translated personality test requires studies of the correlations between test scores and relevant behavioral characteristics. Ideally, the pattern of intercorrelations observed in the source language should be replicated in the target language. In the present study, the construct validity of the SSS was examined by analyzing the relationship between sensation seeking and demographic characteristics, psychological traits, and a wide range of behaviors. Based on previous findings, we should be able to confirm the following hypotheses for the Danish version of the SSS.

1.1. *Basic test characteristics*

The Danish SSS will show relatively high internal consistency. Coefficient alpha will be particularly high for the SSS Total, Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS) and Disinhibition (Dis) scales and relatively low for the Excitement Seeking (ES) and Boredom Susceptibility (BS) scales (Perez and Torrubia, 1986; Zuckerman, Eysenck & Eysenck, 1978).

1.2. *Gender differences*

Danish males will score higher than females on the SSS Total as well as on the TAS and Dis scales. On the ES and BS subscales, sex differences will be smaller or non-existent (Zuckerman et al., 1978).

1.3. *Demographic characteristics*

SSS scores will correlate positively with socioeconomic status and educational level (Zuckerman & Neeb, 1980).

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