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The Eysenck personality factors: Psychometric structure, reliability, heritability and phenotypic and genetic correlations with psychological distress in an isolated Croatian population

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Abstract

We report the psychometric structure of a Croatian translation of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (short-form), its correlations with psychological distress (General Health Questionnaire-30), its heritability, and personality–psychological distress genetic correlations. The setting is a large (≈ 1000), family-based sample of men and women from an isolated Croatian island. The neuroticism and extraversion traits and the lie scale showed good psychometric characteristics. The translated psychoticism scale was unsatisfactory in this sample. It had a very low internal consistency, probably due in part to heavily biased

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item responses. There were significant additive genetic contributions to variation in neuroticism, extraversion, and psychological distress. Psychological distress had a very high genetic correlation with neuroticism, and a moderate genetic correlation with extraversion.

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1. Introduction

There is a growing consensus about the validity of human personality traits as important dispositions toward feelings and behaviours (Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2003). Here we examine the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised, short-form, which includes the traits of neuroticism, extraversion and psychoticism, and a lie scale (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985). Neuroticism and extraversion, especially, appear in most trait models of personality (Matthews et al., 2003). An important part of the validation of any trait-based model of personality and its associated measurement instrument is to investigate its applicability to other cultures. This tends to be done in two ways: emic and etic. Emic research typically uses the lexicon of the local culture to investigate the structure and content of the personality-related terms (Saucier & Goldberg, 2001). Etic research applies personality measures devised in one culture to new cultures and asks whether they show the same psychometric structure and reliability and validity (McCrae, 2001).

A large amount of etic research has been completed on the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. The research has been done mostly on the original 90-item EPQ. Generally, its psychometric structure has been well-reproduced in at least 34 countries (Barrett & Eysenck, 1984; Barrett, Petrides, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1998). Here we apply the 48-item short-form of the EPQ-Revised in a new setting.

There is great interest in discovering the genetic contributions to common, complex diseases (e.g., Davey Smith et al., 2005; Lohmueller, Pearce, Pike, Lander, & Hirschhorn, 2003). One such group of illnesses is states of anxiety and depression, which form a major cause of medical consultation and a large burden of morbidity in the population. Genetic contributions are likely to be polygenic, i.e. with many genes each contributing a small effect (Hirschhorn & Daly, 2005). Moreover, a likely useful route to discovering the genetic contributions to common disorders is to examine the genetic bases of quantitative traits which act as risk factors for them (Flint & Mott, 2001). Among students, Neuroticism from the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised correlated with total scores on the General Health Questionnaire-28 (which measures anxiety and depression) at 0.54 for men ($N = 347$) and 0.52 for women ($N = 550$) (Stewart, Ebmeier, & Deary, 2005). In the same samples the correlations with Extraversion were -0.26 and -0.21 , respectively. Thus, for states of low mood like anxiety and depression, the personality trait of neuroticism is a major target for investigation (Boomsma et al., 2000; Flint et al., 1995; Jardine, Martin, & Henderson, 1984; Kirk et al., 2000; Levinson, 2006; Middeldorp, Cath, Van Dyck, & Boomsma, 2005; Nash et al., 2004; Sham et al., 2000). The extensive review of twin and family studies conducted by Middeldorp et al. (2005) concluded that the comorbidity of anxiety and major depressive disorders was in part due to genetic factors associated with the personality trait of

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