

Original article

# Effects of personal goal disturbance on psychological distress

## *Effets de la perturbation des buts personnels sur la détresse psychologique*

L. Muller<sup>a,\*</sup>, E. Spitz<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> EA 4360 APEMAC, Nancy-University, Paul Verlaine Metz University, Paris Descartes University, Metz, France

<sup>b</sup> Health Psychology, EPSaM – Île du Saulcy, 57006 Metz cedex 1, France

Received 2 November 2009; accepted 10 December 2009

### Abstract

Numerous theories postulate that an individual's quality of life is linked to personal goal regulation (Diener et al., 1997). More specifically, studies which used idiographic methodologies have shown that the degree of importance given to personal goals, their valence (avoidance or approach) and the level of disruption are all involved in the prevalence of psychological distress (Emmons, 1996; Carver and Scheier, 1998; Maes and Karoly, 2005). In addition, Diener and Fujita (1995) postulate that personal goal disturbance would mediate the effect of a person's resources on his quality of life. The objective of this study is to evaluate the role of personal goal importance, the valence of these goals, and personal goal disturbance on psychological distress using a nomothetic evaluation of personal goals. In addition, the study aims to test the hypothesis that personal goal disturbance mediates the effect of daily hassle on an individual's psychological distress. Three hundred and thirty-two members of the public answered the Daily Hassle Scale (Badoux-Levy and Robin, 2002), the Goal Importance Facilitation Scale (GIFS, Maes et al., 2002), and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12, Goldberg, 1972). The statistical analyses revealed that a large number of daily hassles as well as strong personal goal disturbance significantly accounted for high levels of psychological distress and showed a mediating effect of personal goal disturbance on the relationship between daily hassles and psychological distress.

© 2010 Elsevier Masson SAS. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Self-regulation theories; Personal goals; Daily hassles; Psychological distress; Mediating effect

### Résumé

De nombreuses théories postulent que la qualité de vie de la personne est liée à la régulation de ses buts personnels (Diener et al., 1997). Plus spécifiquement, des études, qui pour la plupart ont utilisé des méthodologies idiographiques, montrent que le degré d'importance des buts personnels, leur valence (buts d'évitement ou buts d'approche) ainsi que leur degré de perturbation sont impliqués dans la prévalence de la détresse psychologique (Emmons, 1996; Carver and Scheier, 1998; Maes and Karoly, 2005). De plus, Diener et Fujita (1995) postulent que la perturbation des buts personnels médierait l'impact des ressources de la personne sur sa qualité de vie. L'objectif de cette étude est d'évaluer le rôle de l'importance des buts personnels, de la valence de ces buts, et de la perturbation de ces buts sur la détresse psychologique au moyen d'une évaluation nomothétique des buts personnels. De plus, il s'agira également ici de tester l'hypothèse selon laquelle la perturbation des buts personnels médie l'effet des stressseurs de la vie quotidienne sur la détresse psychologique de la personne. Trois cent trente-deux personnes « tout-venant » ont complété l'échelle des stressseurs de la vie quotidienne (Badoux-Levy and Robin, 2002), l'échelle de buts personnels GIFS (Maes et al., 2002) et le questionnaire de détresse psychologique GHQ-12 (Goldberg, 1972). Les analyses statistiques ont mis en évidence qu'un nombre important de stressseurs de la vie quotidienne ainsi qu'une forte perturbation des buts personnels expliquaient significativement un niveau élevé de détresse psychologique et ont démontré l'effet médiateur de la perturbation des buts personnels sur la relation stressseurs de la vie quotidienne/détresse psychologique.

© 2010 Elsevier Masson SAS. Tous droits réservés.

*Mots clés :* Théories sur l'autorégulation du comportement ; Buts personnels ; Stressseurs de la vie quotidienne ; Détresse psychologique ; Effet médiateur

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [psychologie@laurentmuller.net](mailto:psychologie@laurentmuller.net) (L. Muller), [elisa.spitz@wanadoo.fr](mailto:elisa.spitz@wanadoo.fr) (E. Spitz).

Numerous studies have examined psychological distress by attempting to identify the environmental, social and individual variables which could explain the differences observed among people. Stress, life events, social isolation, occupational situation, financial problems, personality, etc. have been advanced as factors for explaining distress. However, whatever the situation and associated personal experience, this concept gives the same importance to the different variables which define psychological distress itself. Another way of tackling the question of psychological distress is to refer to the quality of life (QoL) as defined by the **World Health Organization (WHO, 1994)**: QoL refers to “individuals’ perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person’s physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and their relationship to salient features of their environment. Consequently, psychological distress (like material and subjective well-being and physical health) figures in all evaluations of an individual’s QoL and can be seen as the consequence of the individual’s perception of the situation from the perspective of his values and personal life expectations<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, the personal goals which every individual pursues will lead them to evaluate the different aspects of their life and environment in terms of the available resources necessary for their goal regulation. If it has been clearly established that personal goals, and their regulation, are linked to the individual’s QoL (Carver and Scheier, 1998; Diener et al., 1997; Emmons, 1996), it also appears that the congruence between the pursuit of personal goals in daily life and social context leads to positive emotional experiences (Cantor and Harlow, 1994). From this perspective, the resources available to someone can lead him to live positive emotional experiences insofar as these resources are useful for him in the pursuit of important personal goals. For example, if a person does not pursue athletic performance goals, special athletic skills will not be linked to his QoL. Diener and Fujita (1995) hypothesize that an individual’s internal and external resources influence his QoL by means of a mediating effect of personal goals. Consequently, a person who does not have the necessary resources at his disposal to pursue important personal goals in life would experience fewer positive affects than a person who has the necessary resources.

For a long time, this hypothesis appeared difficult to test because of the quantity and diversity of personal goals pursued by individuals, and the complexity of developing a nomothetic method for their evaluation. The main undertakings in this area date back to the mid-20th century and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1954). However, if these works currently remain the

most well-known in this domain, they have also put an end to a movement of evaluating personal goals by recognizing the difficulty in discerning the range of goals which people pursue. Beginning in the 1980 s, numerous authors (Brunstein, 1993; Cantor and Blanton, 1996; Emmons, 1989; Klinger, 1977; Little, 1993) have studied this field by using idiographic methodologies of evaluation in which participants are asked to make an inventory of their personal goals. Despite these methodologies having distinct advantages (Sheldon, 2002), they bring into question, however, the principle of inter-individual comparison and complicate the need to draw general conclusions.

In the 1990 s, there was a renewed interest in categorizing human goals. In a review of the literature on the subject, Austin and Vancouver (1996) pointed out the important research by developmental psychologists (D.H. Ford, 1987; M.E. Ford, 1992) in describing the basic content of the plans, desires and interests which motivate human behaviour. These authors developed a taxonomy of human goals on the basis of empirical and clinical work conducted by Ford and Nichols (1987, 1991) on students, professionals and patients over several years. This taxonomy consists of 24 categories of goals on a relatively abstract and decontextualized level of analysis. Unlike Maslow’s pyramid, this taxonomy does not involve hierarchical organization between the categories and no goal is more important or fundamental than another. Although this taxonomy does not pretend to represent all human goals (since an individual’s thoughts concerning the desired or undesired states or consequences are highly idiosyncratic and context specific), it groups a relatively exhaustive and complete set of categories on a high level of abstraction, which should permit “facilitating comparisons between individuals and social groups” (M.E. Ford, 1992 – Table 1).

This taxonomy permitted the development of a nomothetic evaluation of people’s personal goals (Goal importance facilitation scale, GIFS – Maes et al., 2002). As is proposed in this paper, the use of such a tool should lead to studies on the relationship between personal goals and QoL, making it possible to reach conclusions with broad applications.

This study has a dual objective. First, we aim to show that the links which will be revealed between personal goal regulation and the presence or absence of psychological distress are congruent with the observations of earlier research based on idiographic evaluations<sup>2</sup>. This will partly validate the potential of a nomothetic evaluation of personal goals. With this in mind, we are actively interested in three characteristics of personal goals which, according to the literature, have an effect on the QoL (Carver and Scheier, 1998; Diener et al., 1997; Emmons, 1996). We will test the effect of: (1) the degree of importance that an individual gives to personal goals (the less a person pursues goals

<sup>1</sup> Since our study refers to an evaluation of psychological distress, throughout this paper we highlight research results which make reference to variables which constitute the quality of life concept and are often associated with psychological distress. To obtain more wide-ranging information about these different notions, we refer the reader to publications dealing specifically with this subject (Labelle et al., 2001; Rolland, 2000). In our opinion, all these notions are more or less partial expressions of the individual’s quality of life.

<sup>2</sup> Numerous researchers have studied the effect of goal definition and its regulation on various variables of well-being or psychological distress. The results of Carver and Scheier (1998), Emmons (1996), Ford (1992), Boersma et al. (2005) show that the importance of personal goals, the level of abstraction of these goals, intergoal conflicts, regulation disturbance, and even their valence influence levels of anxiety and depression, and, in a general manner, an individual’s well-being.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات