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AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE VERSION OF THE SOCIAL SUPPORT LIST: PRELIMINARY RELIABILITY¹

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Summary.—The 34-item Social Support List developed in The Netherlands combines measures of support satisfaction and support interactions in six subscales plus a total score. The present study was designed to assess the applicability of the list in a different cultural context. Data from 421 American undergraduates were consistent with Dutch findings and support the efficacy of the English language version.

The middle ground between solitary coping and seeking professional assistance involves acquiring social support, i.e., help from nonprofessionals. Social support is viewed as that provided by a spouse or other family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and community support groups. Social support can involve emotional support as well as tangible support, information, and advice. Also, it has been regarded as the feeling of being loved, cared for, and valued (Cobb, 1976).

Social support research has evolved since the initial work in the 1970s. As noted by Trobst (1999), early investigations conducted by epidemiologists established the relationship between social support and health. Social support has recently been linked to lower distress postcancer surgery (Alferi, Carver, Antoni, Weiss, & Durán, 2001) and recovery from burns (Solomon & Roy, 2000). Health, community, and social psychologists later allied with epidemiologists and expanded the investigation of the role of social support. Research has shown social support to be predictive of marital satisfaction (Trobst, 1999) and important in reducing stress experienced with unemployment, long-term illness, retirement, and bereavement (Krantz, Grunberg, & Baum, 1985).

Many measures of social support have been developed. As early as 1988 Heitzmann and Kaplan (1988) identified 23 different measurement techniques. A Dutch investigator, van Sonderen (1990), argued that many of the early tests were limited in that they did not incorporate several important domains of support. Specifically, van Sonderen suggested that, taken alone, discrepancies in support or deficiencies are more important than interactions

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(the amount received) in explaining reported psychological distress. However, he found that the combination of discrepancies and interactions provided an indication of the need for support and important clues in the study of the process. Consequently, he developed the Dutch language version of the Social Support List in The Netherlands, a multidimensional questionnaire in which discrepancies and interactions are combined. The present research examined the initial reliability of the English language version.

METHOD

Participants

A sample of 421 undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology at three American colleges and universities (one each from the east, midwest, and west) responded to the list. There were 241 women and 176 men (four students did not provide information on their sex). The sample ranged in age from 18 to 41 years ($M = 21.2$, $SD = 5.1$).

Measure

The Social Support List measures several dimensions of support which were originally factorially derived in a Dutch sample, namely, daily-oriented emotional support, problem-oriented emotional support, esteem, instrumental support, social companionship, and informative support. In addition to these subscales, a total support score can be employed. The list contains 34 items which are classified into six subscales (see Table 1). The respondent evaluates each item on two separate 4-point scales, one for interactions and one for discrepancies. The response categories for interactions were (1) I miss it, (2) I don't really miss it, but I prefer more, (3) exactly the right amount, and (4) it happens too often. For deficiencies, the categories were rescored in the opposite direction.

TABLE 1
SUBSCALE ITEM DISTRIBUTION

Subscale	Items in Each Scale
Daily Emotional	1, 7, 8, 24
Problem Emotional	3, 6, 10, 11, 17, 26, 29, 34
Esteem	2, 14, 15, 16, 28, 30
Instrumental Support	5, 12, 18, 20, 21, 22, 32
Social Companionship	9, 13, 19, 23, 33
Informative	4, 25, 27, 31

To achieve language equivalence (Dutch to English), a standard forward-backward translation process was employed. During translation consultants reviewed the items on prespecified rules for adequacy of translation (Brislin, 1986). The list was designed to be used for theoretical research in the field of social support and applied research on stress.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cronbach coefficients alpha and mean interitem correlations were computed for each subscale and total score for both discrepancies and interactions measures; they are presented in Table 2. Using the guidelines for the beginning phase of questionnaire development reported by Nunnally (1978),

TABLE 2
COEFFICIENTS ALPHA AND MEAN INTERITEM CORRELATIONS FOR SUBSCALES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT LIST

Subscale	Discrepancies					Interactions				
	Coefficient α				r^*	Coefficient α				r^*
	East	Mid- west	West	Total		East	Mid- west	West	Total	
Daily Emotional	.82	.83	.80	.82	.52	.83	.77	.79	.80	.50
Problem Emotional	.80	.79	.88	.82	.36	.86	.79	.87	.85	.41
Esteem	.77	.75	.83	.78	.38	.75	.79	.85	.80	.40
Instrumental Support	.71	.74	.67	.71	.27	.78	.72	.80	.78	.33
Social Companionship	.85	.83	.88	.86	.54	.83	.78	.87	.83	.49
Informative	.59	.61	.69	.63	.30	.73	.66	.74	.72	.39
Total Score	.93	.92	.95	.93	.28	.94	.93	.96	.94	.32

*Mean interitem correlations.

for the total sample the reliabilities of the subscales (with the exception of the informative subscale in the discrepancy measure) and the total scores were of acceptable magnitudes. Indeed, as alpha is dependent on scale length, the interitem correlations indicate that some low alphas can be attributed to the scale length and not to the lack of coherence among items. Scale means and standard deviations for the total sample are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
SUBSCALE MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Subscale	Discrepancies		Interactions	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Daily Emotional	6.3	2.3	11.4	2.7
Problem Emotional	12.1	3.5	21.0	4.3
Esteem	8.6	2.6	16.4	3.3
Instrumental	10.1	2.7	16.0	3.9
Social Companionship	8.1	2.9	13.8	3.3
Informative	5.7	1.7	9.6	2.4
Total	50.9	12.5	88.1	16.2

Butcher, Nezami, and Exner (1998) recently observed an increase in the cross-cultural use of self-report personality measures adapted for use in cultures other than those for which they were originally intended. Perhaps anticipating this, Eysenck and Eysenck (1983) urged that investigators use cau-

tion when evaluating the responses to these measures because psychometric properties obtained within one culture cannot be assumed for others. They emphasized the necessity of verifying such generalizations empirically. The present findings were consistent with Dutch reliability data and support the efficacy of the English language version. If the list is to become useful in international research, data from additional cultures are needed.

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