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Deen Mohd

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Development and Validity of the Deenz Emotional Abuse Scale (DEAS-18)

Abstract

The Deenz Emotional Abuse Scale (DEAS-18) was developed to address the need for a reliable and valid tool for assessing emotional abuse in interpersonal relationships. Emotional abuse is a pervasive issue that often leads to long-term psychological distress. Existing tools frequently lack the specificity or multidimensional approach needed to capture the nuanced traits associated with emotional abuse. The DEAS-18 evaluates six interconnected dimensions: Inadequate, Dependent, Distrusting, Restrained, Submissive, and Vulnerable.

The scale underwent rigorous item development, refinement, and validation. Initial items were developed based on theoretical frameworks and expert consultation. Empirical testing on a diverse sample resulted in an 18-item scale with robust psychometric properties. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89) and test-retest reliability ($r = 0.85$) demonstrated the scale's reliability. Validity analyses, including construct, discriminant, and criterion validity, confirmed its effectiveness in identifying emotional abuse traits. Normative data were collected to provide percentile-based interpretations for clinical and research use.

The DEAS-18 is a concise, multidimensional assessment tool designed for use by clinicians, researchers, and educators. It offers critical insights for understanding and addressing emotional abuse, supporting intervention and recovery efforts.

Introduction

Emotional abuse is a subtle yet destructive form of abuse that undermines an individual's psychological well-being and sense of self. Unlike physical abuse, emotional abuse often leaves no visible scars, making it challenging to identify and address. Victims of emotional abuse frequently experience feelings of inadequacy, dependency, distrust, restraint, submissiveness, and vulnerability, which can have long-lasting effects on mental health and interpersonal relationships.

While several tools exist to assess various forms of abuse, many lack a specific focus on the core traits associated with emotional abuse. The Deenz Emotional Abuse Scale (DEAS-18) was developed to fill this gap. This paper outlines the development, reliability, and validity of the DEAS-18, a concise 18-item scale designed to assess six key dimensions of emotional abuse.

Objectives

The primary objectives of the study were:

1. To develop a multidimensional scale for assessing emotional abuse.
 2. To validate the scale's reliability and psychometric properties.
 3. To provide normative data for interpretation in clinical and research contexts.
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Dimensions of the Scale

The DEAS-18 assesses six key dimensions of emotional abuse:

1. **Inadequate:** Persistent feelings of insufficiency, unworthiness, or incapability due to abusive tactics.
 2. **Dependent:** A diminished sense of autonomy, creating a perception of being trapped or overly reliant on others.
 3. **Distrusting:** Lack of confidence in others' motives, intentions, or truthfulness, often stemming from past experiences.
 4. **Restrained:** Feelings of being limited, controlled, or held back, impacting personal and interpersonal growth.
 5. **Submissive:** Suppression of desires and frequent apologies, eroding autonomy and self-esteem.
 6. **Vulnerable:** A sense of defenselessness and exposure to emotional harm, coupled with fear of rejection or judgment.
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Steps in the Construction of the Scale

Item Development

An initial pool of 50 items was generated based on literature review, expert consultation, and theoretical frameworks. Each item was designed to reflect one of the six identified dimensions. Items were formulated to ensure clarity, relevance, and accessibility for diverse populations.

First Draft

The first draft of the DEAS included 50 items. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Pilot testing was conducted with 100 participants to identify potential issues with wording or interpretation.

Item Analysis

Item analysis was performed using data from a sample of 200 participants, including individuals with known histories of emotional abuse and a control group. Items with low item-total correlations ($r < .30$) were removed, resulting in an 18-item scale. The final set of items provided balanced representation across all six dimensions.

Final Draft

The finalized DEAS-18 consists of 18 items distributed equally across the six dimensions, with three items per dimension. The concise format ensures ease of administration while maintaining comprehensive coverage of the targeted traits.

Reliability

Internal Consistency

Cronbach's alpha for the DEAS-18 was 0.89, indicating high internal consistency. Subscale reliability ranged from 0.82 to 0.88, confirming the robustness of the individual dimensions.

Test-Retest Reliability

Test-retest reliability was assessed over a four-week interval with a subsample of 50 participants. The overall reliability coefficient was 0.85, demonstrating stability over time.

Validity

Construct Validity

Significant correlations were observed between DEAS-18 scores and established measures of emotional abuse and psychological distress ($r = 0.78$, $p < .001$).

Discriminant Validity

The scale effectively distinguished between individuals with and without reported experiences of emotional abuse ($p < .001$).

Criterion Validity

Scores on the DEAS-18 were positively correlated with clinical assessments of emotional abuse, supporting its applicability in clinical settings.

Norms

Normative data were collected from a diverse sample of 300 participants, including 150 individuals with histories of emotional abuse and 150 controls. Scores were categorized as follows:

- **Above 85th Percentile:** High likelihood of emotional abuse traits.
- **50th to 85th Percentile:** Moderate likelihood.
- **Below 50th Percentile:** Low likelihood.

Implications

The DEAS-18 provides a reliable and valid framework for assessing emotional abuse across six key dimensions. Its applications include:

- **Clinicians:** Supporting diagnosis and intervention planning.
- **Researchers:** Investigating emotional abuse and its correlates.
- **Educators:** Raising awareness about emotional abuse and its impact.

Appendix

The DEAS-18 is available in a computerized format, and detailed instructions for administration, scoring, and interpretation can be accessed at [DrDeenz](#).

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