

The Development and Preliminary Validity and Reliability of Self-Disclosure to Romantic Partner (SDRP) Scale

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to develop and conduct a preliminary psychometric evaluation of the Self Disclosure to Romantic Partner Scale that assesses adults' attitudes towards sharing their personal information that includes disturbing feelings, thoughts, and experiences with their romantic partners. Two studies were conducted for this purpose. The first study was carried out with 200 participants and the second study was conducted with 206 participants. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis showed a one-dimensional factor structure for the seven items of the Self Disclosure to Romantic Partner Scale. Furthermore, the results indicated that Cronbach alpha and McDonald's omega coefficient of Self Disclosure to Romantic Partner Scale were over .70 for both studies. Taken together, these findings suggest that Self Disclosure to Romantic Partner Scale has good psychometric properties.

Keywords

Self-disclosure, romantic relationship, romantic partner, adult, mental health, scale development

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Introduction

Self-disclosure is a form of communication in which an individual consciously introduces herself/himself to another (Pearce & Sharp, 1973). Fisher (1984) also defined self-disclosure as a verbal behavior in which individuals share private information about themselves with one or more people honestly, sincerely, and voluntarily. It might be assumed that the phenomenon of self-disclosure entered the psychological literature with the usage of the catharsis concept meaning the release of emotions or tension. During the 20th century, moreover, the concept of self-disclosure has been handled in various contexts as a therapeutic tool, an individual feature, and a social behavior (Omarzu, 2000). The development of a psychological understanding of this concept has also been aided by adjacent fields like the social sciences and communication (Collins & Miller, 1994).

In recent years, self-disclosure has gained attention as a variable at an individual level negatively associated with mental health problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder (Quan et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2023), depression, anxiety (Quan et al., 2023). Self-disclosure has also an important role in the recent revision of the posttraumatic growth model proposed by Tedeschi and colleagues (2018), in line with previous versions of this model (Calhoun et al., 2010; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). According to the growth model, self-disclosure and the reactions of others to it may facilitate coping with trauma and the emergence of PTG by enabling the development of new schemas (Calhoun et al., 2010). In addition, a growing body of literature has shown that higher levels of self-disclosure were associated with greater PTG (Dou et al., 2022; Song et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2021).

Attempts to measure the phenomenon of self-disclosure dated back more than half a century. One of the first instruments developed to measure self-disclosure was Jourard and Lasakow's Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (SDQ) (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958). The SDQ contained sixty items about general information such as attitudes and opinions, tastes and interests, work or studies, money, personality, and body (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958). In the later years, Wheeless and Grotz (1976) designed the Self-Disclosure Scale to assess self-disclosure in areas of intention, amount, honesty, nature of disclosure, and relevance to topic of discussion. On the other hand, Chelune (1976) developed the Self-Disclosure Situations Survey, taking into account the social situational factors that influence self-disclosure (Chelune, 1976). Moreover, Miller, Berg, and Archer (1983) designed the Self-Disclosure Index to determine individuals' self-disclosure tendencies. Conversely, the Self Concealment-Scale was developed to measure the tendency of individuals to conceal information about themselves (Larson & Chastain, 1990).

When various instruments specially designed to measure self-disclosure were examined, it was observed that limited availability of scale to measure disclosing negative personal information. For this purpose, the most frequently used instrument were the Distress Disclosure Index (DDI) (Kahn & Hessling, 2001) and the Disclosure of Trauma Questionnaire (DTQ) (Müller et al., 2000). The DDI was a unidimensional scale assessing individuals' tendency to disclose distressing information to others

(Kahn & Hessling, 2001). On the other hand, DTQ was designed to measure self-disclosure about traumatic experiences (Müller et al., 2000). However, neither scale measures self-disclosure behavior towards a specific recipient (Kahn & Hessling, 2001; Müller et al., 2000). According to the Heuristic Model proposed by Stokes (1987), the positive responses to the self-disclosure behavior increase the likelihood of self-disclosure in the future, while the recipient's negative responses such as rejection, unresponsiveness or withdrawal may have the opposite effect. It may therefore be a shallow approach to attempt to measure self-disclosure without the disclosure recipient that is not identified clearly, especially if it involves the sharing of negative personal information.

On the other hand, there are also instruments, but they may be limited to marital self-disclosure scales, that measure the individuals' self-disclosure behaviors to a clearly defined recipient. For examples, Marital Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (MSDQ) was designed to assess self-disclosure to spouse in areas of relationship, sex, money, and imbalance (Waring et al., 1998). Spousal Self-Disclosure Scale (SSDS) developed by Çağ and Yıldırım (2017), further, helps to evaluate self-disclosure behaviors to spouse in three dimensions: quality of the relationship, awareness, and openness. However, the purpose of the development or use of both scales does not seem related to self-disclosure of negative personal information (Waring et al., 1998, Çağ & Yıldırım, 2017). Thus, it is not possible with current instruments to evaluate individuals' self-disclosure tendencies to their romantic partner about distressing feelings, thoughts, or experiences, which may or may not related to romantic relationship. The absence of such an instrument is a problematic omission, as it prevents a better understanding of the antecedents and consequences of self-disclosure to romantic partner.

The purpose of the present study was to develop and conduct a preliminary psychometric evaluation of the Self Disclosure to Romantic Partner Scale (SDRPS) that assesses adults' attitudes toward sharing their personal information that includes disturbing feelings, thoughts, and experiences with their romantic partners. Two studies were conducted for this purpose. In Study 1, exploratory factor analysis and initial internal consistency evaluation results of SDRPS are described. In Study 2, confirmatory factor analysis results of SDRPS as well as internal consistency are clarified.

Study 1: Scale development, EFA, initial reliability

Method

Scale development process. Twenty items were generated by the authors. The items were designed to measure the individuals' self-disclosure tendencies to their romantic partner about negative feelings, thoughts, and experiences. 11 experts from different disciplines (e.g., psychological counselling and guidance, Turkish language, and measurement and evaluation) were asked to evaluate the item pool via online survey. Experts evaluated clarity, readability, and appropriateness each candidate item, as well as the relevance of the instruction and response format, and offered qualitative

recommendations. Based on the evaluations of the experts, ambiguous items such as “*I prefer to share my problems with people other than my partner (family members, friends, etc.)*.” were removed. Moreover, the experts stated that some items such as “*It is difficult for me to talk about my problems with my partner*.” and “*It is easy for me to share my troubles with my partner*.” have similar meanings and suggested deleting one of the items. The final version of SDRPS consist of 7 items, which are formulated as 5 positively and 2 negatively directed statements. The statements are assessed on a 5-point Likert type scale ($1 = \text{Never}$, $2 = \text{Almost never}$, $3 = \text{Sometimes}$, $4 = \text{Almost every time}$, $5 = \text{Every time}$) (Vagias, 2006).

Participants. Data were collected from adults in Turkey between November 2021 and December 2021. Participants were recruited using an online survey shared on social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, WhatsApp). The participants were 200 adults who have been in a romantic relationship. 120 (60%) of the participants identified as cisgender women and 80 (40%) as cisgender men. The mean age of the participants was 31.82 ($SD = 8.82$). 77.5% of participants had a least university degree, and 55.5% work full-time. Almost two-thirds of participants (64%) were married, 36% ($n = 72$) were steady dating relationship, as well as all of the participants were in heterosexual relationships.

Results

The exploratory factor analysis

The suitability of the data for factor analysis was evaluated prior to the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test was performed and the KMO value was obtained as .87, which indicates that the sample size is adequate (Harrison et al., 2021). The p value obtained as a result of the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity, which gives information about the factorability of the data, should be significant ($p\text{-value} < .05$) (Harrison et al., 2021) and the Bartlett test was found to be $X^2_{(21)} = 854.427$, $p < .01$. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine whether there was multicollinearity and singularity among the items. According to the results, the correlation coefficients are between .42 and .72, indicating that there is no multicollinearity or singularity problem (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2015).

Principal component analysis was performed to determine the factor structure of SDRPS. As a result of principal components analysis, one factor with eigenvalue greater than 1.00 emerged. This one factor accounted for 64.38% of the total variance. 60% of the total variance explained is considered satisfactory (Hair et al., 2019). The factor loading values of the items of the SDRPS were between .69 and .84, meaning that all items can be measure the construct well (see Table 1) (Büyükoztürk, 2018). Moreover, according to Hair et al. (2019), loadings of $\pm .50$ or higher are deemed practically significant.

Table 1. Factor Loadings for the Self-Disclosure to Romantic Partner Scale.

Items	Factor loadings
1. I tell my partner my thoughts about the traumatic event(s) that I experienced	.84
2. When I share my trouble, my partner makes an effort to understand me	.69
3. It is difficult for me to talk about my problems with my partner.*	.84
4. When I feel distressed, talking with my partner relieves me	.80
5. When I'm upset, I want to talk to my partner	.82
6. I put off talking to my partner about my problems.*	.80
7. I share with my partner the thoughts that make me feel distressed	.81

Note. Items marked with an asterisk are reverse coded.

Reliability

Reliability of the SDRPS was calculated by Cronbach alpha coefficient, McDonald's omega coefficient and item-total correlations. As a result of the analysis, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the SDRPS was obtained as .91 and values above .70 are considered adequate (Büyüköztürk, 2018; Harrison et al., 2021). The item-total correlations of the 7-item scale range from .60 to .77. Items with an item-total correlation of .30 and above are assumed to have high discrimination (Büyüköztürk, 2018). Furthermore, the McDonald's omega coefficient of the SDRPS was found as .91.

Study 2: CFA and reliability

Method

Participants. Data were collected from adults in Turkey in January 2021. Participants were recruited using an online survey shared on social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, WhatsApp). The participants were 206 adults who have been in a romantic relationship. 121 (58.7%) of the participants identified as cisgender women and 85 (41.3%) as cisgender men. The mean age of the participants was 27.58 (SD = 7.62). Less than one-fifth of the participants (16.5%) had a university degree, and 51% worked full-time. The majority of participants (75.7%) were steady dating relationship, 24.3% (*n* = 50) were married, and all of the participants were in heterosexual relationships.

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine the internal structure of the SDRPS. CFA was performed using maximum likelihood estimation, using the program AMOS software. The fit indices used to evaluate the findings and the

criteria were determined for good model fit are as follows: Chi-square/degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) between 2 and 3; Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) greater than or equal to .95, and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) greater than or equal to .90 (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003); Comparative Fit Index (CFI) greater than or equal to .95; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) .06 or less (Hu & Bentler 1999).

Results indicated that the model fit was poor, with $\chi^2/\text{sd} = 9.99$ ($\chi^2 = 139.88$, $\text{sd} = 14$, $p < .001$), GFI = .85, AGFI = .70, CFI = .81, RMSEA = .20. Based on the suggested modification indices, error covariances were drawn between items 3 and 6, items 5 and 2, and items 2 and 4. After the modifications, the analysis was repeated and the results indicated that the model fit indices were as follows: $\chi^2/\text{sd} = 2.63$ ($\chi^2 = 28.99$, $\text{sd} = 11$, $p < .001$), GFI = .96, AGFI = .90, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .08. Considering these values, the one-factor model met the criteria for good model fit, except RMSEA. However, RMSEA is in acceptable range as suggested by Browne & Cudeck (1992). Factor loadings of the 7 items ranged from .35 to .81, and all of them were found to be significant ($p < .001$). The factor loadings of the items are presented in Figure 1.

Reliability analysis

Cronbach alpha coefficient of the SDRPS was found as .86, and values above .70 are considered adequate (Harrison et al., 2021). The item-total correlations of the 7-item scale range from .37 to .71. Items with an item-total correlation of .30 and above are assumed to have high discrimination (Büyüköztürk, 2018). Furthermore, the McDonald's omega coefficient of the SDRPS was found as .86.

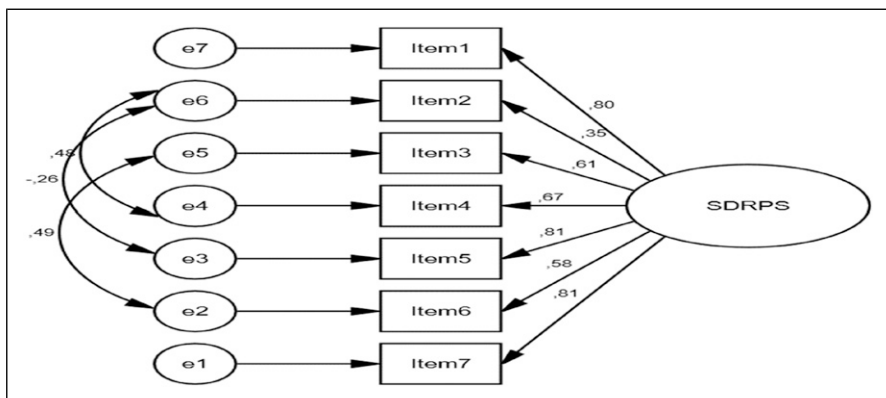


Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis model of SDRPS. Note: All factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Discussions

The relationship between self-disclosure and mental health problems such as TSSB, depression and anxiety, as well as posttraumatic growth has been understudied. In the limited number of studies conducted to date (e.g. Dou et al., 2022; Quan et al., 2023; Song et al., 2021), the Distress Disclosure Index (DDI) (Kahn & Hessling, 2001), in which the disclosure recipient was not clearly identified, was generally used to measure individuals' self-disclosure tendencies. According to the Heuristic Model proposed by Stokes (1987), the recipient's response also influences the increase in the probability of self-disclosure and vice versa. Therefore, it may be a limitation to examine self-disclosure without the disclosure recipient that is not identified clearly.

When the tools developed to measure self-disclosure were examined, it has been observed that there were scales such as Marital Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (MSDQ) (Waring et al., 1998) and Spousal Self-Disclosure Scale (SSDS) (Çağ & Yıldırım, 2017) where items were created in accordance with a specific recipient. However, both scales were established to measure marital self-disclosure (Waring et al., 1998, Çağ & Yıldırım, 2017). In fact, the MSDQ may be a useful measurement tool for examining married individuals' self-disclosure behaviors to their spouses about some issues related to their relationship such as sex life, money, as well as individuals' perceptions of both their disclosing behavior and their listening behavior (Waring et al., 1998). In contrast to the MSDQ, which is designed to measure both the quality and quantity of marital self-disclosure (Waring et al., 1998), the SSDS was developed to measure only the quantity of self-disclosure (Çağ & Yıldırım, 2017). However, contents of some items belonging to the SSDS seems to be related to self-disclosure skills (e.g. *"I don't talk to my spouse because I don't think I can express myself properly."* or the outcomes of self-disclosure behavior (e.g. *"I feel my spouse's support in difficult situations."*) rather than the quantity self-disclosure to spouse (Çağ & Yıldırım (2017). Thus, existing scales are not suitable for measuring an individuals' self-disclosure tendencies toward their romantic partner about distressing feelings, thoughts, or experiences. In this case, there is a need to develop a scale focused self-disclosure to romantic partner. The aim of the present research was to develop a short scale for assessing adults' attitudes toward sharing their personal information that includes disturbing feelings, thoughts, and experiences with their romantic partners. In line with this objective, two studies were carried out to provide evidence on the structural validity and internal consistency of the scale.

In study 1, the results of EFA showed that SDRPS has one factor. This one factor accounted for 64.38% of the total variance. In study 2, the results of CFA showed that the one factor model of SDRPS fits well with the data. In particular, when six items of the SDRP were reviewed, it has showed that the single factor reflected the individuals' self-disclosure tendencies. However, the SDRPS includes an additional item (*"When I share my trouble, my partner makes an effort to understand me."*) designed to measure the discloser's perception of the recipient's responses. Considering that the recipient's responses influence the results of individuals' self-disclosure behaviors (Stokes, 1987),

it is thought that this item is also compatible with the one-factor structure. Moreover, in study 2, factor loading of this item was found to be significant.

Cronbach alpha coefficient, McDonald's omega coefficient and item-total correlations were calculated in both Study 1 and Study 2 to examine the reliability of the SDRPS. Both Cronbach alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients were obtained over .70. In addition, the item-total correlations obtained in both Study 1 and Study 2 indicate high discrimination (Büyükoztürk, 2018).

Limitations

Although Study 1 and 2 showed that SDRPS has good psychometric qualities, these studies were not without limitations. Both studies were conducted with a relatively small number of participants. However, for a small number of factors that differ significantly from each other, a small sample may be sufficient (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2015). De Vellis (2014) also suggested increasing the number of participants included in the analysis as the number of items rises. It should be taken into account that the SDRPS has seven items and a single-factor structure, it may be considered that the sample size of both studies is sufficient. However, it is recommended to re-examine the psychometric properties of SDRPS in future studies with more participants. One other limitation was that only evidence of construct validity was obtained in both studies. In future studies, different types of validity, for example criterion validity and convergent and discriminant validity, may be evaluated (see Bollen, 1989).

Conclusion

There is a paucity of knowledge on adults' self-disclosure tendencies to their romantic partners, especially about own negative personal information. The current study, designed to obtain preliminary evidence for the validity and reliability of the SDRPS, it is worth noting that further studies are needed, may provide an opportunity to examine the antecedents and consequences of self-disclosure to romantic partner. Moreover, the current study highlights the importance of explicitly specifying the recipient and the content for a better understanding of the self-disclosure phenomenon.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Ethical Statement

Ethical approval

Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study. Ethical approval was given for the study by Trabzon University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings this study is available on request from correspondence author. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participations.

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