Relationship between personal meaning organisations and psychological and personal well-being in a Chilean sample

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Artículo Original

Resumen	Abstract	Tabla de Contenido

The aim of this study was to evaluate the relationship between personal meaning organisations (PMO) and aspects of psychological and personal well-being in an adult population. The sample consisted of 104 adults (M = 36.52 SD = 14.85 years, 56 women). Sociodemographic variables, well-being and PMO were evaluated. The following instruments were used: Mini Questionnaire of Personal Organization (MQPO), Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB). The statistical analysis included summary measures, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), Pearson's correlation coefficient, and stepwise multiple linear regression models; a significance level of p < .05 was adopted. Significant negative correlations between PMO scores and levels of psychological and personal well-being were found. In the regression models, strongest predictor was Detached PMO, followed by Contextualised PMO, which had a negative influence on well-being. Detached PMO had a negative impact on levels of personal well-being and especially on psychological well-being.

Keywords: personality, disorder, psychological impairment, flexibility, post-rationalist.

Relación entre las organizaciones de significado personal y el bienestar psicológico y personal en una muestra chilena. El objetivo de este estudio fue evaluar la relación entre las organizaciones de significado personal (OSP) y aspectos del bienestar psicológico y personal en una población adulta. La muestra estuvo constituida por 104 adultos (M = 36.52 DE = 14.85 años, 56 mujeres). Se evaluaron variables sociodemográficas, bienestar y OSP. Se utilizaron los siguientes instrumentos: Mini Cuestionario de Organización Personal (MQPO), Índice de Bienestar Personal (PWI) y Escala de Bienestar Psicológico (PWB). El análisis estadístico incluyó medidas de resumen, consistencia interna, correlación de Pearson y modelos de regresión lineal (p < .05). Se encontraron correlaciones negativas significativas entre las OSP y el bienestar psicológico y personal. En los modelos de regresión, el predictor más fuerte fue la OSP depresiva, seguida de la OSP dápica, con una influencia negativa en el bienestar. La OSP depresiva tuvo un impacto negativo en los niveles de bienestar personal y especialmente en el bienestar psicológico.

Palabras clave: personalidad, trastorno, deterioro psicológico, flexibilidad, posracionalista.

Historically, personality has been understood as structural aspects that define the person which are generally inferred from behaviour. However, there is no unified concept of personality. Psychology of Personality offers many theoretical and empirical approaches for its study (Cano et al., 2005). Moreover, the structural conception of personality considering only inner characteristics has been questioned in the past 50 years. In 1968, Mischel criticised not only the assessment methods, but also the historical premises on personality (Mischel, 2009).

Almost 40 years ago, Guidano and Liotti began to study the processes and psychological mechanisms operating in people, using a rigorous scientific approach. Thereafter they migrated from cognitivism to an emotional-relational approach (Moltedo, 2008). This provided the basis for what we now know as the personal meaning organisations (PMO). A PMO is a coherent process undergirding organisation of experience; it describes a specific set of scenes and nuclear statements, an expression of subjective construction and personal distinctions leading to

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different rearrangements of the world and the continuous flow of experience (Moltedo, 2008). Currently there are four accepted types of PMO: Contextualised, Controller, Principle Oriented, and Detached (Nardi et al., 2012). PMO were defined using a clinical population (Ruiz, 2007) and can be differentiated into two types: Inward/Outward and Approach/Avoidance. PMO have demonstrated a clear correlation with the activation of brain structures such as the amygdala, hippocampus and the orbitofrontal cortex (Naranjo-Vila et al., 2010).

For this post-rationalist approach, the enduring elements crucial for maintaining internal coherence, providing stability, and ensuring constancy over time in the foundational modality, are encapsulated within the concept of PMO. PMO serves as a linchpin, assuring every individual the capacity to retain a profound sense of personal uniqueness and historical continuity amid life cycle transformations. Functioning as organizing systems, PMO integrates various fundamental emotional tonalities with semantic cues embedded in language. This integration strives to sustain a consistent, explicit, and positive self-image, thus conferring coherence to the comprehensive psychological system and fostering its viability. Consequently, it establishes an ongoing process of self-regulation, rooted in the comprehension and internal reordering of experiences into intersubjective meanings. Instances where external disruptions resist assimilation into one's sense of self may result in an inability for ongoing experiences to be self-referred, potentially manifesting as symptomatic expressions. When there is predictability in the care provided by attachment figures, emotions, particularly those deemed basic or primary, tend to manifest earlier. These emotions do not necessitate advanced cognitive development for activation and are linked to a self-referential ordering system focused on one's own emotions and sensations, fostering an inward perspective. Otherwise, if the construction of identity were built upon the unpredictability of access to the attachment figure, it would result in a weaker discrimination of internal states. This foundation, rooted in ambiguity, inconsistency, and variability in responses to attention demands, would give rise to more complex emotional tonalities that develop later. The activation of these emotional nuances would require cognitive evaluation to guide behaviour, leading to a construction of reciprocity centered on an outward focus (Naranjo-Vila et al., 2010).

Over recent decades, PMO have been evaluated by clinical procedures and the judgement of expert psychologists. However, there were no psychometric instruments available to evaluate PMO. To address this, Nardi et al. (2012) began developing a PMO Questionnaire. This questionnaire had 40 items comprising four subscales, one for each PMO (Contextualised, Controller, Principle Oriented, and Detached). Then, 29 items were pre-selected and finally 20 items were selected (retaining four sub-scales/PMO) to form the Mini Questionnaire of Personal Organisation (MQPO).

Personality and well-being

Despite the criticism and doubts about the structural understanding of personality and its disorders, it is clear that one of the distinguishing features of the latter is the existence of distress or impairment in at least two areas (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013), following the disease-approach. Another vision is provided by the theoretical lines concerning well-being (Alfaro Inzunza et al., 2013; Ryff, 2014): hedonic well-being relates to happiness and eudaimonic well-being relates to personal potential development (Díaz et al., 2006).

Hedonic well-being corresponds to personal or subjective aspects, based on three areas: positive emotions, negative affect, and life satisfaction, involving a cognitive and emotional assessment. This framework assesses not only individual psychological aspects, but also sociological, quality of life and health (Alfaro Inzunza et al., 2013). Psychological well-being, or eudaimonic, closely corresponds with Maslow´s concept of self-actualisation. However, until Ryff´s work (2014) it was not easy to define its central components. Currently it is accepted that psychological well-being includes: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Díaz et al., 2006).

Many investigations have addressed the disorder-impairment relationship. Diedrich and Voderholzer (2015) in a review on obsessive-compulsive disorder indicated that there is ample evidence of the negative consequences of this disorder in terms of psychosocial functioning, quality of life and economic burden. According to

Fineberg et al. (2015), this is due to a significant cognitive inflexibility and deficits in executive planning capacity. This would explain the internal and external manifestations of the phenomenon, which eventually bring discomfort especially in the psychosocial area. In borderline personality disorders well-being is compromised by impaired impulse/aggression control that can lead to suicide. There is an association between levels of aggression, especially self-harm and suicide attempts (Baus et al., 2014). Kelly et al., (2013) found that the combination of flexibility and toughness to achieve goals in life was associated with increased personal well-being, and reduced depression, hostility and physical illness. On the other hand, Masuda and Tully (2012) found an inverse association between flexibility/mindfulness and psychological distress (somatisation, depression, anxiety and malaise).

Overall, the literature has shown an inverse relationship between well-being and personality disorders (including the trait rigidity/inflexibility). However, this evidence comes from a structural view of personality, lacking a post-rationalist approach. The recent development of scales under a post-rationalist approach allows us to explore this relationship (Mariani et al., 2021; Nardi et al., 2012). Furthermore, MQPO has been validated into Spanish, for its application to Colombian (Tamayo Lopera et al., 2020) population.

The objective of this exploratory study was to evaluate the relationship between PMO and psychological/personal (eudaimonic/hedonic) well-being in a sample of adult population from Concepción, Chile.

Methods

Design and participants

This was a non-experimental, transversal and correlational study. The target population (non-clinical) were adults from Concepción, Chile. They were enrolled from public spaces in the city of Concepción, including: university campuses, parks, and city down town. Exclusion criteria were: illiterate population, any physical impediments to answering questionnaires, and older than 80 years. A convenience sample of 104 people (56 women and 48 men) was gathered. The sample size was estimated for a correlation value $r > .3$, a confidence level of 95%, and 80% statistical power. 59.62% of the sample was single (n = 62),

and 31.73% were married (n = 33), 7.69% were divorced (n = 8), and 0.96% were widowers (n = 1). The average age was 36.52 years (DS = 14.85) with 13.86 years (DS = 2.74) of schooling.

Procedure

Data collection was performed in three public places in Concepción. After meeting the selection criteria, they were included in the study. The aim of the study and ethical considerations were explained to the participants and their signed informed consent was obtained. The project was approved by the School of Psychology at the Universidad del Desarrollo, Concepción, Chile.

Data analysis

Univariate analysis of the sociodemographic variables, PWI, PWB, and MQPO was conducted with descriptive statistics. Internal consistency was evaluated with Cronbach's alpha >.70 was considered acceptable. The correlation between variables was assessed with Pearson's correlation coefficient ($p < .05$). Relations between PMO and other variables were assessed using stepwise multiple linear regressions (forward-selection, only predictor variables with $p < .10$ were included). All analyses were performed using STATA (version 13) statistical software.

Results

Table 1 shows the scores for MQPO, PWI, and PWB by sex. Table 2 shows the correlations between the MQPO and PWI/PWB scores, with their respective sub-scales.

The initial regression model always included all sociodemographic and PMO variables as predictors. For the PWI, the only significant predictor was age ($β = -0.12$; $p = .05$); this model accounted for 2.68% of the variance. Regarding standard of living (PWI), the only significant predictors were age ($β = -0.03$; $p = .03$) and being divorced ($β = -1.65$; $p = .04$); this model explained 8.81% of the variance. For health (PWI), the only significant predictor was Detached PMO ($β = -0.11$; $p = .01$); this model explained 8.58% of the variance. For achievement in life and relationships with others (PWI), the model failed to identify any significant predictors. Regarding security (PWI), the model explained 11.44% of the variance, with being male ($β = -0.68$; $p = .02$), age ($β = -0.03$; $p = .05$), and Detached PMO ($β = -0.08$; $p = .03$) as significant predictors. For community ties (PWI), the model explained 15.54% of the variance, with

being divorced (β = -2.81; *p* < .01), and Detached PMO (β = -0.16; *p* = .05) as significant predictors. Regarding future security (PWI), the only significant predictor was Detached PMO (β =-0.11; *p* < .01); this model accounted for 8.06% of the variance.

Table 1.
Mean and standard deviation of Mini Questionnaire of Personal Organization, Personal Wellbeing Index and Psychological Well-Being Scale by sex

Scale	Women	Men	General
	M (DS)	M (DS)	M (DS)
Mini Questionnaire of Personal Org.	65.09 (10.13)	68.77 (8.20)	66.79 (9.42)
Contextualized	16.79 (4.56)	18.25 (4.11)	17.46 (4.38)
Controller	19.98 (2.61)	19.85 (2.77)	19.92 (2.67)
Principle Oriented	15.61 (3.30)	16.60 (3.06)	16.07 (3.21)
Detached	12.71 (4.58)	14.06 (3.59)	13.34 (4.18)
Personal Wellbeing Index	54.88 (8.76)	54.40 (9.41)	54.65 (9.02)
Standard of living	7.09 (2.11)	7.98 (2.11)	7.50 (2.15)
Health	7.70 (1.80)	7.48 (1.70)	7.60 (1.75)
Achievement in life	8.14 (1.65)	7.67 (1.71)	7.92 (1.68)
Personal relationships	7.54 (2.03)	7.92 (1.49)	7.71 (1.80)
Safety	8.88 (1.36)	8.23 (1.63)	8.58 (1.52)
Community ties	7.27 (2.18)	7.25 (2.08)	7.26 (2.12)
Future security	8.27 (1.47)	8.04 (1.61)	8.16 (1.53)
Psychological Well-Being Scale	160.68 (21.24)	154.81 (20.38)	157.97 (20.96)
Self-acceptance	26.09 (4.74)	24.83 (4.83)	25.51 (4.80)
Positive relations with others	21.80 (5.82)	19.40 (6.25)	20.69 (6.11)
Autonomy	27.71 (5.60)	27.75 (5.48)	27.73 (5.52)
Environmental mastery	26.38 (4.33)	24.79 (4.04)	25.64 (4.26)
Personal growth	29.70 (5.47)	29.48 (4.78)	29.60 (5.14)
Purpose in life	29.00 (4.30)	28.56 (4.34)	28.80 (4.31)

For the PWB, the model explained 38.85% of the variance, with the significant predictors being a widower (β = 35.59; *p* = .03), years of schooling (β = 2.34; = .01), and Contextualised PMO (β = -0.98; *p* = .01). The regression model explained 15.09% of the variance for self-acceptance (PWB), with being divorced (β = 8.18; *p* = .07), Contextualised PMO (β = -0.24; *p* = .02), and Detached PMO (β = -0.27; *p* = .01) as significant predictors. For positive relationships with others (PWB), the model explained 31.64% of the variance, with years of schooling (β = -0.61; *p* < 01) and Detached PMO (β = -0.57; *p* < .01) as significant predictors. The regression model explained 24.35% of the variance for level of autonomy (PWB), with Detached PMO (β = -0.32; *p* = .01),

and Contextualised PMO (β = -0.50; *p* < .01) as significant predictors. For level of environmental mastery (PWB), the model explained 28.58% of the variance, with being male (β = -1.62; *p* = .03), widowed (β = -7.88; *p* = .03), divorced (β = -5.71; *p* < .01), years of schooling (β = 0.34; p = .02) and Detached PMO (β = -0.25; p = .01) as significant predictors. The model explained 32.36% of the variance for personal growth (PWB), with being a widower (β = 8.38; *p* = .05), years of schooling (β = 0.86; *p* < .01), and Detached PMO (β = -0.34; p < .01) as significant predictors. Finally, for purpose in life (PWB), the only significant predictor was years of schooling (β = -0.41; *p* = .01), explaining 5.8% of the variance.

Table 2.

Correlations of Mini Questionnaire of Personal Organization and Personal Wellbeing Index and Psychological Well-Being Scale

Scale	Contextualized	Controller	Principle Oriented	Detached
Personal Wellbeing Index	-.15	-.06	-.07	-.16
Standard of living	.01	.03	-.11	-.06
Health	-.06	-.06	-.11	-.27*
Achievement in life	-.09	-.14	-.09	-.02
Personal relationships	-.11	-.10	.00	.02
Safety	-.05	.10	-.03	-.23*
Community ties	-.22*	-.18	.05	-.03
Future security	-.20*	.09	-.04	-.30*
Psychological Well-Being Scale	-.33*	-.09	-.10	-.51*
Self-acceptance	-.27*	-.19	-.08	-.28*
Positive relations with others	-.21*	-.09	-.15	-.51*
Autonomy	-.45*	-.13	-.02	-.33*
Environmental mastery	-.21*	-.05	-.14	-.35*
Personal growth	-.13	.10	-.04	-.37*
Purpose in life	-.06	-.03	.02	-.22*

Note. $* p < .05$

For the PWB, the model explained 38.85% of the variance, with the significant predictors being a widower (β = 35.59; p = .03), years of schooling (β = 2.34; p = .01), and Contextualised PMO (β = -0.98; p = .01). The regression model explained 15.09% of the variance for self-acceptance (PWB), with being divorced (β = 8.18; p = .07), Contextualised PMO (β = -0.24; p = .02), and Detached PMO (β = -0.27; p = .01) as significant predictors. For positive relationships with others (PWB), the model explained 31.64% of the variance, with years of schooling (β = -0.61; p < 01) and Detached PMO (β = -0.57; p < .01) as significant predictors. The regression model explained 24.35% of the variance for level of autonomy (PWB), with Detached PMO (β = -0.32; p = .01), and Contextualised PMO (β = -0.50; p < .01) as significant predictors. For level of environmental mastery (PWB), the model explained 28.58% of the variance, with being male (β = -1.62; p = .03), widowed (β = -7.88; p = .03), divorced (β = -5.71; p <; .01), years of schooling (β = 0.34; p = .02) and Detached PMO (β = -0.25; p = .01) as significant predictors. The model explained 32.36% of the variance for 8.38; p = .05), years of

schooling (β = 0.86; p < .01), and Detached PMO (β = -0.34; p <.01) as significant predictors. Finally, for purpose in life (PWB), the only significant predictor was years of schooling (β = -0.41; p = .01), explaining 5.8% of the variance.

Discussion

PMO rigidity (higher scores on sub-scales was negatively correlated with some well-being aspects, albeit a weak predictor. Also, only Detached and Contextualised PMO had some significant negative correlations with well-being aspects, especially Detached. Despite some positive correlations between PMO and some aspects of well-being, none of these correlations were significant. Contextualised and Detached PMO had higher significant correlations with PWB, thus the eudaimonic approach of well-being was better correlated with PMO.

If we consider that Contextualised PMO defined by external (acceptable) social standards (Ruiz, 2007), we can argue that when this functioning becomes rigid, conflicts with others would occur with dependent styles or a constant concern about others´ evaluation (associated with

neuroticism). The latter would explain the occurrence of discomfort pointed out in the literature (Samuel et al., 2013; Vachon et al., 2013). This can create a pattern of inflexibility in order to meet social expectations, with poor development of internal aspects, which was also correlated with lower levels of well-being (Masuda & Tully, 2012).

On the other hand, if we consider that Detached PMO is characterised by loneliness and the need to act or defend oneself against the vicissitudes of life (Ruiz, 2007), it would be expected that people with higher scores on this scale would feel more insecure about the present and the future. The same would occur with health; if illness appears they have no one supporting them. This is consistent with the literature, where negative emotions were associated with longer depression, anxiety, and physical illnesses (Masuda & Tully, 2012). It is also important to remember that Beck's conception of depression (Sanz, 2013) considers a negative view of self (health), the other (feeling of safety) and future (security in the future), indicating some correspondence of this cognitive line with the post-rationalist line of thought (Naranjo-Vila et al., 2010), although both relate to different aspects: the first with a clinical impairment and the second with a permanent view of reality.

Correlations with psychological well-being were more frequent and intense than with personal well-being. In the hedonistic vision of personal well-being, the satisfaction of certain basic aspects prevails leading to an increase in positive affect and decrease in negative affect (Alfaro Inzunza et al., 2013), influenced more by external/changing factors than internal/constant ones. In contrast, psychological well-being seems more related to internal aspects (Díaz et al., 2006), and thus less susceptible to seasonal variations and more stable over a person's life.

For the negative correlation between Contextualised PMO and the domain of the environment and especially autonomy, we found a fully consistent link with the theory, since the Contextualised rigidity places the criterion of self-assessment on the other (social parameters of being good), which necessarily involves a loss of control and freedom. The significant and negative correlations between psychological well-being and Detached PMO was expected. However, the most noticeable was the strongest correlation of this

PMO with positive relationships, confirming the basic feature of depression, which is a deep sense of detachment and distance from others. This would be consistent with the ample evidence showing the positive effect that social support and positive relationships with others have on well-being (Lee et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2014).

When controlling for sociodemographic variables, the results did not change. Regarding the overall assessment of personal well-being, the only significant variable was age, although it showed little impact, thus it is difficult to discern what role it plays in well-being. However, considering the physical/psychological deterioration and lack of economic/social support with older age groups in Chile (Fuentes-García et al., 2013), it would be logical to hypothesise that age has a negative effect.

Regarding aspects of personal wellbeing it is possible to describe several associations found in the regression analysis. The standard of living negatively correlated with age, which would be explained for the reasons given above. Additionally, being divorced was also negatively correlated and could be explained by reduced social support (Lee et al., 2016), as well as by lower income associated with the payment of child support. As for the level of health, Detached PMO was the only significant predictor, consistent with the theoretical basis described above. Regarding security levels, Detached PMO, age, and being male were predictors of a lower level of security; the association with Detached PMO and age could be explained by social support as described above. Being male could be explained by the role of provider placing him in a situation of uncertainty/pressure regarding the performance of this role. Regarding the links with the community, being divorced and Detached PMO were the only predictors, with a negative influence; this is consistent with a study examining a population from Santiago (Salinas Ulloa & Aranis Soto, 2014), which could be influenced by the changing role involving divorce and detachment from the group, possibly causing isolation from social groups. As for security in the future, the only significant predictor was Detached PMO, with a negative influence which has already been explained above.

Regarding psychological well-being, the significant predictor was Contextualised PMO, with negative effects, which could be explained by the

arguments already mentioned. On the other hand, schooling was a significant positive predictor, which is consistent with the eudaimonic vision of well-being associated with personal development (Díaz et al., 2006). The latter is explained by the noticeable expectations of higher education on social mobility in Chile, associated with economic and social recognition improvements (Palma-Amestoy, 2022). In relation to self-acceptance, only Detached and Contextualised PMO were predictors of lower well-being, explained by the reasons mentioned previously and are consistent with the post-rationalist approaches (Moltedo, 2008; Ruiz, 2007). For positive relationships with others, as expected, Detached PMO was a negative predictor, while schooling was positive; the latter is explained by the notorious consequences of higher education on social recognition (Huerta Wong, 2012). Regarding autonomy, both Detached and Contextualised PMO have an influence, although probably for different reasons: Detached given the perceived shortage of external resources or social support (Stansfeld et al., 2013) and Contextualised due to little freedom associated with meeting the expectations of others (Ruiz, 2007). In relation to environmental mastery, Detached PMO, being divorced and being male were negative predictors, which as explained would be produced by the loss of control experienced by these groups; the years of schooling was a positive predictor, consistent with the positive effect that schooling has on income (Huerta Wong, 2012). For personal growth, the negative effect of Detached PMO and the positive effect of schooling were repeated; both effects are consistent with the concept of psychological or eudaimonic well-being (Díaz et al., 2006). However, years of schooling shows a negative influence on purpose in life, which it seems non coherent with the rest of the PWB dimensions. Overall, it is important to note that for our population schooling involves an enhancing or protective factor for psychological well-being, which clearly must be considered when evaluating people with different PMO.

Future studies should consider working with larger sample sizes and sampling techniques that provide greater representation. It would also be important to analyse groups differentiating between clinical and non-clinical populations, since initially the PMO were described in a clinical population (Moltedo, 2008; Ruiz, 2007), so the

behaviour of these variables could clearly differ between groups. Considering previous research, further studies including other predictors of well-being such as perceived stress, coping strategies, income, cognitive flexibility and mindfulness (Kelly et al., 2013; Masuda & Tully, 2012) are needed; these variables may have a modifier effect of PMO on well-being and could explain a greater percentage of variance.

On the contrary, it is imperative, within the framework of the post-rationalist perspective, to systematically assess the pertinence of the Controller and Principle Oriented PMO in Chilean demographic cohorts. The internal consistency levels of these sub-scales and their correlation with individual well-being introduce a measure of skepticism regarding their appropriateness within this specific population. This constitutes the principal constraint of the present investigation, as evidenced by the fact that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the aforementioned subscales (Controller and Principle Oriented) registered values below the conventional threshold of $< .70$, traditionally deemed acceptable in psychometric assessments. In this context, it is imperative to acknowledge that the phenomenon may be exacerbated by factors such as social desirability and nuances in the formulation of questionnaire items, both of which can significantly influence respondent reactions. Such considerations hold particular relevance when applying the assessment instrument to the broader populace, as opposed to its customary application within the more homogenous cohort of psychology students or patients.

Despite the limitations, the results of this study provide preliminary evidence of the negative impact of the rigidity of PMO on the levels of well-being, especially its eudaimonic aspects.

Data availability

The entire set of materials supporting the results of this study is available upon request to the contact author Ricardo Cartes-Velásquez.

Availability of analytical methods

The full suite of analytical methods supporting the results of this study is available upon request from the contact author Ricardo Cartes-Velásquez.

Availability of materials

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Acknowledgments

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