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## STRATEGIES OF COPING WITH TRANSGRESSOR - POLISH VALIDATION OF TRIM-18 QUESTIONNAIRE

### Summary

The aim of this paper is to present the results of Polish validation of Transgression – Related Interpersonal Motivations questionnaire (TRIM-18) by McCullough, Root, and Cohen (2006) which measures the phenomena of forgiveness. The article contains a description of the procedure of Polish translation, the results of the test reliability, discriminant and confirmatory validity. The study was conducted among 530 participants aged between 18 and 84 (345 females and 185 males). Eleven questionnaires were used for assessing the validity of the measurement. This study confirms that the structure of Polish TRIM-18 is relevant to the English language version. Polish TRIM-18 is also a very reliable tool. It can be successfully used in Polish conditions.

**Keywords:** Forgiveness, TRIM-18, benevolence, revenge, avoidance, positive psychology

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STRATEGIE RADZENIA SOBIE Z KRZYWDZICIELEM -  
POLSKA WALIDACJA KWESTIONARIUSZA TIRM-18

## Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników polskiej walidacji kwestionariusza mierzącego strategię radzenia sobie z krzywdzicielem, które odpowiedzialne są za zjawisko przebaczenia (TRIM-18; Transgression – Related Interpersonal Motivations; McCullough, Root and Cohen 2006). Artykuł zawiera opis procedury dotyczącej tłumaczenia z języka angielskiego na polski, wyniki analizy czynnikowej, analizy dyskryminacyjnej oraz trafności zewnętrznej. W poniższych badaniach wzięło udział 530 osób w wieku od 18 do 84 lat (345 kobiet i 185 mężczyzn). Do oceny trafności teoretycznej testu użyto jedenastu kwestionariuszy. Badanie potwierdza, że struktura polskiej wersji kwestionariusza TRIM-18 jest zgodna ze strukturą wersji anglojęzycznej. Kwestionariusz TRIM-18 w wersji polskiej okazał się jest również bardzo rzetelnym narzędziem. Może być z powodzeniem stosowany w warunkach polskich.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przebaczenie, TIRM-18, życzliwość, odwet, unikanie, psychologia pozytywna

## INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental needs of each individual human being is that of experiencing affection and closeness (Harlow 1958; Bowlby 2007). The human being is by nature a social creature, opened for contacts with another “Thou” (Buber 1992). It is through interpersonal relations that a person shapes his/her identity and develops his/her own potentials, can discover the sense of life and the way to happiness and well-being (Seligman 2011). Human relations, apart from these positive dimensions, can also be the source of frustration, conflict, misunderstanding, hurt, rejection etc. Among many forms of reactions to those kinds of transgression there is anger, depression, sorrow, regret, revenge and/or withdrawal. However, these negative reactions could be handled in totally different ways by accepting pro-social attitudes connected with forgiveness. Although reflections on forgiveness in the context of philosophy, ethics and morals, have a long history, there is still a lot to learn and understand about its social and psychological aspects (Roberts 1995; Worthington 1998). Without a doubt, forgiveness is a significant aspect regulating the quality of the social function (McCullough and Worthington 1999).

There are some psychological depictions, next to the intra-personal ones, that distinctly impact the inter-personal process of forgiving. The reality of forgiveness involves internal processes of changing feelings, attitude and the way of thinking; it also has a social dimension because it is ultimately directed towards a real person or a circumstance which caused that suffering. Michael McCullough (2001) defines forgiveness as a pro-social transformation of the relation towards transgressors. The transformation happens when, instead of feeling the desire for revenge, a person turns towards benevolence. Enright and Coyle define forgiveness as a desire to depart from the right to dislike, negative judgment, neutral behaviour towards the transgressor (Enright and Coyle 1998). Tangney and others specify (1999) forgiveness as a cognitive-affective transformation during which the victim encounters realistic evaluation of the

experienced harm and attributes the responsibility for it to the transgressor. However, the nature of free will offers the possibility of cancelling the (perceived) debt, giving up revenge, and dismissing the punishment and demand for restitution. The cancelling of the debt is related to liberation from negative emotions towards the transgression and the transgressor. In general, the victim decides not to function as a victim anymore and, through the act of forgiveness, becomes free of the negative impacts to health and wellbeing. In this concept, the key is the work on the emotional level. Thompson with his fellow researchers (2005) claim that forgiveness is liberation from a negative relation – the source of transgression and harm. Ray and Pargament (2002) claim that forgiveness involves both an agreement to let negative thoughts go and lack of desire to act negatively towards a transgressor. It is a possibility of a positive, or at least neutral, response to the transgressor (see also: Trzebińska 2008).

Experimental and practical psychology set very important practical goals. One of them is creating tools to measure theoretical constructs which are first defined. Then, it looks for specific methods to apply them in life. The same happens with the subject of forgiveness. There are many studies of the construct because there are many theoretical depictions. Generally, we could divide the tools of measuring forgiveness according to how the information is collected: self-report, partner-report, outside observer, behaviour measure (McCullough et al. 2000).

There are several tools which measure forgiveness defined in different terms. In the following part of the paper we would like to focus on a particular questionnaire. At the end of the 90's, McCullough, in cooperation with other scientists, created a 12-item scale *Transgression – Related Interpersonal Motivations* TRIM-12 Inventory (Polish version: Kossakowska 2011). TRIM-12 contains 2 subscales: avoidance of the transgressor and the desire to retaliate. Ten years later, McCullough worked out a new version consisting of 18 items – TRIM-18 (McCullough et al. 1997; McCullough et al. 1998; McCullough et al. 2006). This tool is intended to examine the pro-social change that occurs in the victim towards the transgressor. This change is defined in 3 dimensions: the extent to which one's motivation of avoidance is lowered, the extent to which one's desire of revenge is lowered, and the extent to which one's desire for benevolence grows. It deals with a change in attachment, from negative to positive, that does not require the change of the cognitive, emotional or behavioural sphere.

The aim of this study is to present the psychometric parameters of the Polish validation of TRIM-18 questionnaire which is widely used by researchers all over the world (e.g. McCullough et al. 1998; Ghaemmaghami, Allemand and Martin 2011).

## 1. TRANSLATION PROCESS OF TRIM-18

TRIM-18 Inventory (McCullough et al. 1998) measures forgiveness conceptualized as a process of reducing one's negative (avoidance and revenge) motivations toward a transgressor and restoring one's positive motivations regarding

a transgressor (McCullough et al. 1997) and benevolence motivation (McCullough et al. 2003; McCullough and Hoyt 2002). All items are rated on the same 5-point Likert-type scale.

For the questionnaire to be used in Polish conditions, validation tests were carried out during the initial phase. At first, the original version of the questionnaire was translated by 2 translators from English into Polish. Then, with the use of the *translation-back translation* methodology, the questionnaire was translated back from Polish into English to compare both English versions in terms of translation accuracy. Finally, once the accuracy had been discussed with another two bilinguals, those translations were accepted which on the one hand were most faithful to the original items and, on the other hand, were comprehensible and natural for Poles. Such a version of the questionnaire was used in subsequent validation tests<sup>3</sup>.

To confirm the 3-factor structure of the questionnaire a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out. To estimate the reliability of the test, Cronbach's alpha was used for each subscale separately. In order to estimate the theoretical accuracy of the questionnaire, r-Pearson's coefficients were established for examining the relations between striving after revenge, avoidance of or benevolence towards the transgressor and various of psychosocial factors.

## 2. METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The test participants included 530 people aged between 18 and 84 (345 females and 185 males). Because there were quite a large number of questionnaires to be filled in, not all the participants completed all 11 questionnaires. It should be noted, that 530 people participated in the questionnaire structure verification tests, whereas between 44 and 249 people participated in the questionnaire's theoretical accuracy correlation tests. The size of each group is given in the test results table.

The average age of respondents was 27.83 (SD=12.18). The education level of 32% of the respondents was basic or vocational, 24% secondary and 44% higher. The respondents filled in the questionnaires online (33%) and in group tests (67%)<sup>4</sup>. All respondents were Polish, mostly from north and central Poland. They were employed by production companies (33%), service companies (25%) or were students or pupils (38%). 4% of the respondents were unemployed; the majority of these were housewives.

In order to assess the concurrent validity, except TRIM-18 the participants filled in 10 other questionnaires as follows.

a) Global self-worth was measured by Self-Esteem Scale (SES). It assesses both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be uni-

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<sup>3</sup> Full Polish version of TRIM-18 one may find at the website of University of Miami (FL, USA) <http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/mmccullough/Forgiveness-Related%20Stuff/TRIM%2018%20PL.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> The field tests were carried out by students of the EMPIRIA Research Club at the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Faculty in Sopot, Poland.

dimensional (Rosenberg 1965; Polish version: Łaguna, Lachowicz-Tabaczek and Dzwonkowska 2007).

b) Positive and negative affect were measured by Positive (PA) and Negative Affect (NA) Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al. 1988; Polish version: Brzozowski 2010).

c) Intensity of experiencing positive emotions across the life span in general was assessed by Positive Emotions Scale (PES; Kossakowska in print). It consists of 3 subscales named: LOVE, JOY and HOPE.

d) The negative emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress were measured by DASS 21 which is a shorter version of DASS. The DASS was constructed to further the process of defining, understanding, and measuring the ubiquitous and clinically significant emotional states usually described as depression, anxiety and stress (Lovibond and Lovibond 1995; Polish version: Makara-Studzińska et al., in preparation).

e) Individual differences in generalized and dispositional optimism versus pessimism were assessed by Life Orientation Test (LOT; Scheier, Carver and Bridges 1994; Polish version: Juczyński 2001).

f) Independent and interdependent self-construal according to Markus and Kitayama concept (1991) was measured by Self-Construal Scale (SCS) by Singelis (1994, Polish version: Pilarska 2011). These two images of self are conceptualized as reflecting the emphasis on connectedness and relations often found in non-Western cultures (interdependent) and the separateness and uniqueness of the individual (independent) stressed in the West.

g) Spirituality in the concept of transcendence was assessed by Self-report Questionnaire (SRQ; Heszen-Niejodek and Gruszczynska 2004). It assesses three domains of spirituality: Religiosity (measures beliefs towards God and faith), Ethical Sensitivity (measures moral behavior and people's interest in life and fate) and Harmony (measures the drive toward looking for the internal consistency between the inner and outer world).

h) Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al. 2006; Polish version: Kossakowska, Kwiatek and Stefaniak 2013) was also used to measure two dimensions of meaning in life: Presence of Meaning (how much respondents feel their lives have meaning – MLQ-P), and Search for Meaning (how much respondents strive to find meaning and understanding in their lives – MLQ-S).

i) Finally, Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6; McCullough et al. 2002; Polish version: Kossakowska and Kwiatek 2014) was taken to assess individual differences in the proneness to experience gratitude in daily life.

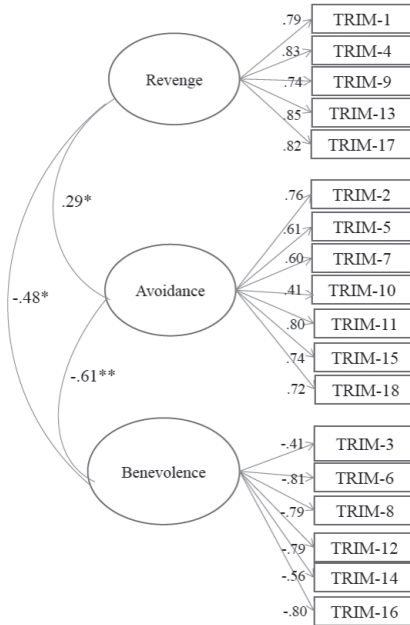
j) Additionally, the Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale (Cantril 1965) was used to assess quickly the satisfaction with life. It is a one item scale which measures well-being in terms of the continuum representing judgments of life or life evaluation (Diener et al. 2009).

### 3. RESULTS

#### a) Structure of Polish TRIM-18

A confirmatory factor analysis for Polish TRIM-18 indicated a 3-factor structure showing acceptable fit of the observed data, with RMSEA = .089 and CFI = .89. ML Chi-Square was 658.13,  $p < .0001$ ,  $df = 132$ , RMS = .086. Goodness-of-fit index GFI was .873, and adjusted AGFI was .835. The factorial structure of the 3-factor model was in agreement with the forgiveness theory and comparable to that of the structure proposed in the original TRIM-18 (despite slight differences in item loadings, see: Figure 1. Factor loading for each item and Pearson's  $r$  between subscales coefficients are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Factor loadings for TRIM-18 items in Polish version.



#### b) Reliability for TRIM-18 (PL)

Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscale and the total score of TRIM-18 in Polish version are presented in Table 1. All coefficients are considered satisfactory.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and  $\alpha$ -Cronbach's coefficients for the subscales of TRIM-18 (PL)

Factor	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
1. Revenge	10.58	4.93	.88
2. Avoidance	23.13	6.50	.83
3. Benevolence	17.12	5.85	.88

## c) Concurrent validity for TRIM-18 (PL)

We expected that forgiveness defined as strategies of coping with transgressor would be associated with personality aspects (e.g. self-esteem) and emotional state (positive, negative affect, intensity of positive emotions in daily life, stress, depression or anxiety discomfort). We predicted that self-esteem would be positively related to benevolence and negatively to revenge or avoidance. We hypothesized that positive affect would be positively correlated with benevolence and negatively with revenge and benevolence. We were not sure if forgiveness was related to all psychological resources but we predicted that optimism, spirituality, meaning in life and gratitude were likely to be correlated to forgiveness: positively with benevolence and negatively with revenge and avoidance. We did not believe that forgiveness would be correlated with such dimensions of the self as independence and interdependence.

All questionnaires were used in Polish versions. Gender, age and educational level as socioeconomic characteristics were also computed in the following study. All the Pearson's  $r$  values are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Pearson's  $r$  coefficients between TRIM-18 and personality, emotional state, psychological resources and demographic and well-being measures

	Revenge	Avoidance	Benevolence
<u>demographic factors:</u>			
age, n=530	-.17**	-.08	.13**
gender, n=530	.18**	-.06	.07
educational level, n=530	-.28**	.06	.10*
<u>well-being measure:</u>			
Cantril Ladder, n=249	-.05	-.12	.11
<u>personality measure:</u>			
SES, N=44	.03	-.10	-.08
<u>emotional state:</u>			
PANAS-PA, n=44, $\alpha$ =.84	.08	.02	-.05
PANAS-NA, n=44, $\alpha$ =.84	.15	-.03	.18
PES: Total, n=100, $\alpha$ =.82	.00	.14	-.08
PES: LOVE	-.13	.03	.08
PES: JOY	.12	.17	-.19
PES: HOPE	.07	.19	-.04
DASS-Total, n=79, $\alpha$ =.93	-.04	.16	-.21
DASS-Anxiety	-.03	.17	-.19
DASS-Depression	.00	.12	-.19
DASS-Stress	-.07	.14	-.18

psychological resources:

LOT, n=79, $\alpha=.69$	-.29**	-.27*	.43**
SCS, n=79, $\alpha=.64$			
SCS: Independence	-.06	-.08	.17
SCS: Interdependence	-.15	-.05	.02
SRQ-Total, n=44, $\alpha=.89$	-.07	.04	.12
SRQ-Religiosity	-.15	.11	.18
SRQ-Ethical Sensitivity	.18	.02	-.08
SRQ-Harmony	-.02	-.02	.08
MLQ-P, n=100, $\alpha=.78$			
MLQ-S, n=100, $\alpha=.78$	.20*	.15	-.28**
GQ-6, n=100, $\alpha=.78$			
	-.21*	.15	.21

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Note:

SES: Self-Esteem Scale; PES: Positive Emotions Scale; DASS: Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale; LOT: Life Orientation Test; SCS: Self-Construal Scale; SRQ: Self-Reported Scale; MLQ-P: Meaning in Life Questionnaire-Presence; MLQ-S: Meaning in Life Questionnaire-Search; GQ-6: Gratitude Questionnaire

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The Polish TRIM-18 questionnaire to examine forgiveness, in particular, the 3 ways of coping with a transgressor: striving after reprisal (revenge), avoidance of a transgressor and benevolence toward a transgressor is a valuable tool for conducting tests in Polish circumstances. This is proved by the values of goodness-of-fit indices and accuracy measures. The in-depth translation allows us to assume that the Polish version of the items are unambiguously comprehensible for Polish users. The loading of two items of the questionnaire may raise some doubts. Items 3 and 10 got quite low results, i.e. about 41. Item 3 loads the benevolence factor and item 10 avoidance. Since the confirmation analysis did confirm the original structure of TRIM-18, despite the relatively low loading of two items they were kept in particular subscales just as it had been intended by the authors (McCullough et al. 2006). This will enable us to carry out possible future intercultural comparisons of results of tests designed with the use of TRIM-18. There is a profound meaning of such comparisons, especially if they deal with notions of a philosophic nature or notions adapted to psychological sciences (e.g. Kossakowska, Kwiatek and Stefaniak 2013).

The accuracy analysis requires a few words of comment. The test results draw our attention first of all to the ambiguity of the construct of forgiveness understood as motivation toward a transgressor. In our tests, avoidance of a transgressor correlates only with optimism ( $r=-.27$ ). According to the TRIM-18 questionnaire,

avoidance of a transgressor seems to be ambiguous behavior toward a person who betrayed our trust. On the one hand, the harmed person denies the existence of the transgressor (e.g. item 5), on the other, it avoids the transgressor behaviorally (item 11, 15). However, avoidance refers also to the difficulty in being polite to the transgressor (item 10), whereas this type of declarative difficulty is not equal to avoidance *sensu stricte*. We should also consider this strategy from the point of view of reasons for which the harmed person avoids the transgressor. The harmed person may avoid the transgressor not because he or she did not forgive, but on the contrary because this is the harmed person's way of trying to "forgive", forget, or cope with the anguish suffered during possible meetings with the transgressor.

Thus, according to our empirical data and the analysis of particular items, what is avoidance? What is it in reality if it correlates neither with negative affect nor religiousness which would encourage a person to be brave in coping with the transgressor, nor gratitude? However, our test showed that avoidance is related to pessimism. The bigger a pessimist a person is, the more willingly he or she avoids the transgressor. Therefore, maybe as a pessimist our respondent does not believe that confrontation with the transgressor may change anything in their relations and thus, prefers to avoid the latter. Avoidance also plays a protective role which is adaptive on condition that it is beneficial psychosocially and does not result in greater suffering.

To obtain the answer to the question what avoidance of the transgressor in fact is, we should, for example, check with which coping strategies it correlates (see: Gruszecka 2003), whether it conforms with the belief in the fair world, people or God (Lerner 1997; Skrzypińska 2003) and whether it causes distant results e.g. in the form of a bad mental or somatic condition. It is also worth checking if avoidance of the transgressor is a stable motivation or if it varies in time or even, as we suggested, it is temporary. Therefore, this motivation is worth looking at within longitudinal and experimental studies.

In comparison to the previously discussed motivation, striving after reprisal or revenge is a more precise and decidedly better defined motivation. It manifests itself most of all in the desire to get even with the transgressor, in wishing him or her to be similarly hurt by others, in the need to feel satisfaction from the transgressor's suffering. This is an active desire for revenge, on the one hand, but an extremely negative attitude towards the transgressor, on the other. Our tests show that younger people, with lower education and males are more prone to get revenge. These socio-demographic factors quite clearly show what revenge can be – it may be connected with a weaker process of socialization, greater behavioral activity, poorer life experience and bigger vulnerability.

Striving after revenge is also related to the presence of the meaning in life ( $r=.20$ ). This relation is difficult to explain at this stage of testing and it requires further exploration by searching for intermediate factors. It is not easy to be indifferent to the conclusion created by this result that revenge may become the sense of a person's life. This interpretation seems hardly moral. However, we do not

know whether those striving after revenge consider morality at all. Perhaps a good explanation to the meaning-creative sense of revenge is to suggest that revenge can be an effective attempt to prevent the transgressor from possibly further harming the person already hurt (McCullough et al. 2013). The need for revenge for suffering should, therefore, be examined in a wider context taking into account individual motifs of reaching for revenge as the method of coping with harm as well as different types of harm, probability of being harmed again and subjective evaluation of the extent of harm (McCullough and Hoyt 2002).

The desire for revenge is stronger in pessimists and weaker in optimists ( $r=-.29$ ). This result is not a surprise in view of the to-date tests conducted with the use of the same questionnaire in the Spanish speaking population (Rey and Extremera 2014). The result confirms the accuracy of our version of the TRIM-18 questionnaire. The relation between gratitude and striving after revenge was confirmed in our previous tests where this variable was measured with the use of the 12-item from (TRIM-12) questionnaire (see: Kossakowska and Kwiatek 2014). Those persons who do not feel gratitude are more prone to take revenge on the transgressor ( $r=-.21$ ). On the contrary, those who are able to be grateful are less prone to avenge themselves for the suffering. This result is similar in other populations and confirms the accuracy of the Polish TRIM-18 (Rey and Extremera 2014).

Our test showed also that the need for revenge is not related to any positive affect, hence, it is not pleasant (although, it is neither unpleasant because it is not connected with negative emotions). Similarly, we did not find a relation between satisfaction with previous life measured with the Cantril ladder. This result suggests that respondents do not wish to feel continuously the desire for revenge.

The most positive attitude toward a transgressor seems to be benevolence. First of all, a benevolent person wishes his or her transgressor a good life despite the harm suffered. Such a person needs to forget the grudge, do away with anger and repair the interpersonal relation. However, in our tests benevolence still does not correlate with a positive affect or wellbeing, neither does it increase the self-esteem or has any relation to religiousness, or ethical sensitivity or spirituality as such. Lack of this relation makes us think what benevolence toward a transgressor in fact is and what psychological factor it involves. Our test showed quite high correlation with optimism ( $r=.43$ ). Optimists more often present a benevolent attitude toward the transgressor. However, this benevolence does not add meaning to their life. On the contrary, the more meaningful the victim's life is, the less benevolent he or she feels toward the transgressor. This result is consistent with the already discussed positive correlation between meaning in life and revenge.

Moreover, the test proved that benevolence increases with age and educational status. Thus, education favors cultivating the benevolent attitude in life. Additionally, the relation between benevolence and age should be further examined, for instance by monitoring the time since suffering occurred as previous test results show that

the context of time is connected with forgiveness (Kossakowska and Kwiatek 2014). Moreover, other test results indicate that forgiveness depends on other additional factors: the way of processing the harm suffered, the extent of guilt attributed to the transgressor and oneself (Gruszecka 1999), type of relationship (romantic vs. friendly) (Van Dyke and Elias 2007), and time (McCullough et al. 2003), that has passed since suffering occurred (McCullough and Hoyt 2002).

Our tests prove the thesis that forgiveness is not an easy construct but a complex motivation or attitude which requires it to be further analyzed. Adaptation of TRIM-18 as a tool for measuring forgiveness, and in particular three types of motivation toward the transgressor, may appear very useful, all the more so because beside the American tests there are hardly any others available to allow cultural comparisons which could provide a new contribution to understanding psychological mechanisms of this theoretically difficult construct.

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