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Using positive psychology measures in clinical practice: Reliability and validity in an Australian population

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Abstract: For the majority of individuals the term mental health is synonymous with mental illness. Mental health has a medical focus on the diagnosis of illness and management of psychological distress. However, there is a growing understanding that mental health should be considered as a holistic state that includes both mental illness and mental well-being. To encourage clinicians to use a dual-factor model of mental health, newer positive psychology measures need to have their psychometric properties established and compared with current clinical measures. A selection of positive psychology measures (MHC-SF, Flourishing Scale, SWLS, LOT-R) along with traditional measures of mental illness (Kessler-10, Basis-24, DASS21) were administered to an Australian sample of community dwelling adults (n=173, M=30.5, SD=11.3). With the exception of the LOT-R, the internal consistency of the positive psychology measures was excellent (>.9). High reliability coefficients were also found for the three clinical measures. Convergent validity was demonstrated through high significant correlations between the positive psychology measures (r=.72 to .82); and lower significant negative correlations with psychological distress measures (r = -.51. to -.65) These consistent correlation patterns indicated robust construct validity as measures of positive mental health separate from traditional measures of psychological distress. The structure of the MHC-SF was also examined using factor analysis. However unlike previous research, a two factor model that combined the emotional and psychological well-being factors, along with a social well-being factor, was a more parsimonious fit for the data. Both MHC-SF factors had excellent internal consistency. The use of a dual factor model of mental health has the potential to revolutionize how we think about recovery and outcome. It provides an evidence based framework to support the development of novel systems of health care that incorporate positive indicators of well-being

along with traditional measures of mental illness, to more fully understand mental health outcomes. Newer positive psychology measures are easy to use, inexpensive and reliable and valid. They send a clear message that assessment and treatment planning have a strengths based approach to recovery and outcome, and their use should be encouraged.

Keywords: clinical assessment Positive psychology Psychological Assessment