



Time perspective, psychological distress, and self-regulation: A mediation model[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Time perspective
Psychological distress
Self-control
Impulsivity
Mediation

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate a conceptual model of psychological distress (PD), positioning time perspective (TP) as an antecedent variable and self-regulation—operationalized through self-control and impulsivity—as mediators within the proposed framework. A sample of 453 Argentine adults (69% female), aged 18 to 60 years ($M = 32.47$, $SD = 12.04$), completed validated measures of TP, self-control, impulsivity, and PD. Correlational and path analyses revealed that TP dimensions are significantly related both self-regulation and PD. Specifically, future and positive past orientations were associated with higher self-control and lower distress, while negative past and hedonistic present orientations predicted lower self-control and greater distress. Final model demonstrated good fit and explained 41% of the variance in PD. These findings support the conceptualization of TP as a personality trait influencing self-regulation processes, which in turn affect psychological well-being. The study highlights self-control as a modifiable protective factor and underscores the importance of integrating personality variables into models of psychological distress.

1. Introduction

Time perspective (TP), introduced by Lewin (1951), refers to the cognitive framing of experience across past, present, and future. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999, 2008) conceptualized TP as a largely non-conscious process that organizes experience into temporal categories, guiding behavior and decision-making. This framework proposes five orientations—Past-Negative, Past-Positive, Present-Hedonistic, Present-Fatalistic, and Future—each reflecting distinct attitudes that shape goal setting, emotional responses, and behavioural regulation.

Empirical research consistently links TP to mental health. While Past-Negative and Present-Fatalistic orientations are associated with higher anxiety, depression, and lower life satisfaction, a Balanced TP promotes greater well-being and adaptive functioning (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004; Stolarski et al., 2014). TP is also relevant for psychological adjustment through its influence on risk-taking and health-related behaviors (Stolarski et al., 2014; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

TP is frequently conceptualized as a stable personality-related

construct (Wiberg et al., 2017; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Although it can fluctuate following significant life events (Sircova et al., 2014; Sobol-Kwapińska et al., 2016), it reflects enduring individual differences. Longitudinal findings suggest TP emerges from temperamental dispositions (Wills et al., 2001), with temperament being the strongest predictor of its development during adolescence (Stolarski et al., 2021). These results support viewing TP as a dispositional, largely non-conscious cognitive dimension (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999, 2008).

A core process linked to TP is self-regulation—the capacity to guide thoughts and behaviors toward valued goals (Vohs & Baumeister, 2016). Self-regulation underlies behaviors like planning and health maintenance (Gellert et al., 2012; van Raaij et al., 2023), while its failure manifests as substance use or risk-taking (McKay et al., 2018; Price et al., 2017). Within this framework, self-control involves inhibiting impulses for long-term outcomes (APA, 2015), whereas impulsivity reflects a preference for immediate rewards through attentional deficits and risk-taking (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001). While self-control involves conscious effort, TP operates implicitly, shaping temporal evaluations

[☆] This article is part of a Special issue entitled: 'Personality and temporality' published in Personality and Individual Differences.

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