THE MALADAPTIVE DAYDREAMING SCALE (MDS)

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posted by Rita Handrich

We posted earlier this week about the new concept of “maladaptive daydreaming” and those researchers published a second article on an actual 14-item scale to assess whether a specific individual is a maladaptive daydreamer. Since it's a strange area that may end up in the courtroom—we thought we'd share information and some of the items on the scale with you.

As a reminder, maladaptive daydreaming was defined by Eli Somer (in 2002) as “extensive fantasy activity that replaces human interaction and/or interferes with academic, interpersonal or vocational functioning”. While there is a proliferation of self-help information on the internet, this scale has just been published and while not freely available (at this writing) on the internet it is at the journal website (behind a paywall—posted as supplemental material).

The measure was developed and tested on 447 subjects (340 self-identified maladaptive daydreamers and 107 controls who “daydreamed normally”) and was found to have good psychometric properties (highly reliable and valid) and to be an appropriate measure for assessing the presence of maladaptive dreamers in clinical research. The final scale contains 14 items that assess the following elements of maladaptive daydreaming: Quality (usually rich and very detailed), Control (is the person able to control the daydreaming?), Distress (does the daydreaming cause distress?), Benefits (what are the benefits associated with daydreaming?), and Functioning (is the person able to function?).

We know what you really want to see here are some of the questions in the measure, so we will not delay further. Here are 5 sample questions from the measure (with the element of maladaptive daydreaming the question measures identified).

How often are your current daydreams accompanied by physical activity such as pacing, swinging, or shaking your hands?
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When a real world event has interrupted one of your daydreams, how strong was your need or urge to return to that daydream as soon as possible? (Element measured: Control)

If you go through a period of time when you are not able to daydream as much as usual due to real world obligations, how distressed are you by your inability to find time to daydream? (Element measured: Distress)

Some people love to daydream. While you are daydreaming, to what extent do you find it comforting and/or enjoyable? (Element measured: Benefit)

For some people, the experience of daydreaming interferes with their academic/occupational success or personal achievements. How much does your daydreaming interfere with your academic/occupational success? (Element measured: Function)

If you are not experiencing maladaptive daydreaming, it may be difficult to see these questions as documenting a real condition. And if this trait is part of a claimed condition that requires some kind of accommodation (we are talking to you, HR professional or employment litigator), the issue of how “real” it is, will become important to you very quickly. It is certainly something that would interfere with life function, and if it becomes a facet of a diminished capacity claim (falling short of a psychotic episode) it might be used to explain allegedly bad behavior.


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