

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

**Optimism, Temperament and Adaptation
in Early Childhood**

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between optimism, temperament and adaptation in early childhood (ages 4-6). The goal of the study was to validate a new questionnaire developed to assess optimism in early childhood. In recent years, many theories have been established to define optimism, including theories that discuss people's explanatory style (Seligman, 2000), control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1982), and anticipation of success (Schweizer, Beck-Seyffer & Schneider, 1999). There is a multitude of studies that demonstrate a clear link between optimism and a range of psychological functions in adults (for example, Achat, Kawachi, Spiro, DeMolles & Sparrow, 2000). However, when examining early childhood, there are inadequate tools for assessing optimism (Hayden, Klein, Durbin & Olin, 2006). The goal of this study was to examine the development of a new measure for assessing optimism in early childhood. For validation purposes, the relationship between optimism, temperament and general adaptation was examined, based upon previous studies indicating a link between these variables (Heinonen, Raikkonen & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2005). The study included 50 subjects, and the average age of the participants was 4.7 (standard deviation of 5.5 months). Temperament was assessed through a series of measures based upon a set of laboratory tests (Leb-TAB), adaptation was assessed through a CBCL questionnaire, and optimism was assessed through the newly developed questionnaire.

Findings indicated that the optimism questionnaire has high internal validity ($\alpha = .80$) and that there is a clear sense of optimism in early childhood. Findings also indicate that there is a negative correlation between optimism and temperament in five scales: arousal, anger, sadness, pleasure and smiling. The scale of activity, on the other hand, has a positive correlation with optimism. In addition, a negative correlation was

discovered between optimism and violence, while in general, regression analysis indicates that optimism does not explain adaptability on a significant level.

The advantages and disadvantages of the developed questionnaire and the implications in assessing optimism in early childhood are discussed at length in the discussion chapter.