

Factor Structure of the Brief Inventory of Personality Organization and Its Convergence with DSM-5 Personality Disorders

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the factorial structure of the Brief Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-30) in an Iranian nonclinical population and to investigate its convergence with DSM-5 maladaptive personality traits and structural personality functioning. This descriptive-correlational study was conducted on 162 participants from the general population, including 47 men and 115 women aged 17 to 66 years. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling and assessed using the Structured Interview of Personality Organization (STIPO), the 30-item Brief Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-30), and the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (PID-5). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation, and confirmatory factor analysis using SPSS version 23 and AMOS version 24. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the original two-factor model of the IPO-30 did not fit the data adequately ($\chi^2/df = 3.28$, CFI = 0.549, GFI = 0.563, AGFI = 0.497, RMSEA = 0.119). Exploratory factor analysis yielded a revised 26-item, four-factor structure consisting of Reality Testing, Moral Values, Aggression, and Defense & Identity. These four factors explained a substantial proportion of the total variance and demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70. Furthermore, all extracted personality organization dimensions showed significant positive correlations with all five maladaptive personality trait domains of the PID-5, including Negative Affectivity, Detachment, Antagonism, Disinhibition, and Psychoticism ($p < .01$), supporting convergent validity. In contrast, correlations between the IPO-derived factors and most STIPO dimensions were not statistically significant, except for a small negative association between the Moral Values factor and the STIPO Moral Values domain ($p < .05$). The findings indicate that the original two-factor structure of the Brief Inventory of Personality Organization is not fully supported in the Iranian population. Instead, a culturally adapted four-factor, 26-item model demonstrated superior psychometric properties, acceptable reliability, and meaningful associations with DSM-5 maladaptive personality traits.

Keywords: Personality Organization; Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO); DSM-5 Personality Disorders; Maladaptive Personality Traits; Reality Testing; Personality Assessment; Factor Analysis; Psychometric Properties.

1. Introduction

Personality disorders constitute one of the most significant and complex categories of mental disorders because they involve enduring maladaptive patterns of cognition, emotion, interpersonal functioning, and behavioral regulation that persist across time and situations. These disorders are associated with substantial impairments in social, occupational, and psychological functioning and frequently co-occur with a wide range of psychiatric conditions, contributing to increased clinical burden and reduced quality of life (Sadock et al., 2017). Traditional diagnostic systems have conceptualized personality disorders as distinct categorical entities; however, accumulating evidence has challenged the adequacy of categorical approaches due to high comorbidity rates, diagnostic heterogeneity, and limited sensitivity to variations in symptom severity (American Psychiatric, 2013; Samuel & Widiger, 2011). Consequently, contemporary research has increasingly emphasized dimensional and structural approaches to personality pathology, focusing on the underlying organization of personality rather than solely on discrete diagnostic categories (Amini, 2018).

One of the most influential structural models of personality pathology was developed by Kernberg through object relations theory. According to this perspective, personality pathology is best understood through the organization of internalized object relations and the structural integration of psychological functioning. Kernberg proposed that personality organization exists along a continuum ranging from neurotic to borderline and psychotic levels, with differences reflected in identity integration, defensive functioning, and reality testing (Clarkin & Kernberg, 2015). This conceptualization has significantly advanced the understanding of severe personality pathology by emphasizing the organization of personality structures rather than the mere presence of symptoms. Research has shown that impairments in personality organization are closely linked to emotional dysregulation, unstable interpersonal relationships, identity diffusion, aggression, and maladaptive coping strategies (Newcomb et al., 2024; Preti et al., 2015).

Borderline personality organization, in particular, has attracted considerable attention because it occupies a central position in Kernberg's model and represents a level of personality functioning characterized by identity diffusion, primitive defensive operations, and fluctuating reality testing. Recent studies have demonstrated that borderline

personality organization is associated with a wide range of maladaptive outcomes, including self-harm, interpersonal instability, emotional dysregulation, pathological narcissism, and difficulties in reflective functioning (Newcomb et al., 2024; Sepahvand et al., 2025). Moreover, contemporary investigations have revealed that early adverse experiences, attachment disruptions, and deficits in mentalizing significantly contribute to the development and maintenance of borderline personality organization (Kurt & Çakır, 2025). Network-based analyses have further indicated that personality factors and defensive styles interact dynamically within borderline personality organization, highlighting the complexity of structural personality functioning and the need for comprehensive assessment approaches (Yun et al., 2024).

The growing emphasis on structural personality assessment has led to the development of several instruments designed to operationalize Kernberg's theoretical framework. Among these measures, the Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO) has emerged as one of the most widely used self-report instruments. Originally developed to assess core dimensions of personality organization, the IPO evaluates identity diffusion, primitive defenses, reality testing, aggression, and moral values. These domains reflect essential components of Kernberg's model and provide a multidimensional assessment of personality functioning (Preti et al., 2015; Sagstetter et al., 2020). Research has consistently demonstrated that the IPO captures meaningful variations in personality organization across both clinical and nonclinical populations and exhibits substantial associations with psychopathology, affective dysregulation, and maladaptive personality traits (Sagstetter et al., 2020).

Despite its theoretical and clinical relevance, the factor structure of the IPO has remained a subject of ongoing debate. Early investigations generally supported a multidimensional structure corresponding to the theoretical domains proposed by Kernberg. However, subsequent psychometric studies produced mixed findings regarding the number and composition of latent factors. For example, exploratory structural equation modeling conducted in nonclinical samples revealed discrepancies between the theoretical structure and the empirically derived factor solution, suggesting that some dimensions may overlap considerably or reflect broader underlying personality functioning constructs (Ellison & Levy, 2012). Similarly, norming studies of abbreviated forms such as the IPO-16 have demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties

while also indicating that shorter versions may capture personality organization differently across populations (Zimmermann et al., 2015).

In response to these concerns, researchers have sought to refine and validate abbreviated versions of the IPO. A notable contribution in this area was provided by Sagstetter and colleagues, who proposed a brief version of the IPO based on a two-factor conceptualization. Their findings suggested that personality organization may be represented by a general severity factor accompanied by more specific stylistic dimensions, thereby integrating both structural impairment and personality style within a unified model (Sagstetter et al., 2020). This approach aligns with broader trends in personality pathology research emphasizing hierarchical and dimensional models of psychological dysfunction. Nevertheless, evidence regarding the cross-cultural applicability of this factor structure remains limited, and further validation studies are required to determine whether the proposed structure generalizes across different cultural and linguistic contexts.

The importance of examining personality organization has been further reinforced by developments in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5). In Section III of DSM-5, the Alternative Model for Personality Disorders (AMPD) introduced a dimensional framework that conceptualizes personality pathology in terms of impairments in personality functioning and maladaptive personality traits (American Psychiatric, 2013). Within this model, personality functioning constitutes Criterion A and encompasses disturbances in identity, self-direction, empathy, and intimacy. Criterion B focuses on maladaptive personality traits organized into five higher-order domains: Negative Affectivity, Detachment, Antagonism, Disinhibition, and Psychoticism (American Psychiatric, 2013). This dimensional framework reflects a substantial shift toward assessing the severity and structural organization of personality pathology rather than relying solely on categorical diagnoses.

Several studies have highlighted substantial convergence between Kernberg's concept of personality organization and the DSM-5 alternative model. Structural impairments assessed through personality organization measures appear closely related to impairments in self and interpersonal functioning emphasized by Criterion A (Amini, 2018; Preti et al., 2018). Furthermore, maladaptive personality traits measured through DSM-5 instruments have demonstrated meaningful associations with identity diffusion, primitive defenses, and reality testing deficits (Thomas et al., 2013;

Wright et al., 2012). These findings suggest that personality organization may provide a valuable theoretical bridge linking psychodynamic and dimensional perspectives on personality pathology.

The Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (PID-5) has become one of the most widely used instruments for assessing maladaptive personality traits within the DSM-5 framework. Research examining the psychometric properties of the PID-5 has consistently supported its reliability and validity across diverse populations (Amiri, 2017). Studies have shown strong relationships between PID-5 domains and established personality models, including the Five-Factor Model, while also demonstrating robust associations with various forms of psychopathology (Thomas et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2012). Moreover, investigations of maladaptive personality traits have revealed significant connections with behavioral dysfunction, emotional dysregulation, and risk-related behaviors, emphasizing their clinical relevance (Abdi & Mardani, 2018).

Alongside self-report measures, clinician-administered assessments remain essential for evaluating personality organization comprehensively. The Structured Interview of Personality Organization (STIPO) was specifically developed to operationalize Kernberg's model through a semi-structured interview format. The STIPO assesses identity, object relations, primitive defenses, coping rigidity, aggression, moral values, and reality testing, providing a detailed evaluation of structural personality functioning (Horz-Sagstetter et al., 2017). Research has demonstrated that the STIPO yields reliable and clinically meaningful assessments of personality organization and exhibits significant associations with other measures of personality functioning (Preti et al., 2018). Furthermore, studies have shown that even relatively inexperienced raters can effectively utilize the STIPO to evaluate personality functioning when appropriate training is provided (Preti et al., 2018). Evidence from validation studies conducted in Iran has also supported the utility of the STIPO in assessing personality organization and its relationship with broader indicators of psychopathology and functioning (Hemmati, 2018).

Recent empirical investigations have continued to underscore the significance of personality organization as a foundational construct in understanding both adaptive and maladaptive psychological functioning. Comparative studies have shown substantial differences in personality organization between individuals characterized by bright

personality traits and those exhibiting dark personality features, indicating that structural personality functioning extends beyond psychopathology and influences broader personality development (Salman Nasab et al., 2024). Similarly, research examining self-harming behaviors has demonstrated that personality organization exerts both direct and indirect effects through mechanisms such as childhood trauma and reflective functioning (Sepahvand et al., 2025). These findings further support the importance of accurately measuring personality organization and validating assessment tools across diverse populations.

Despite the growing body of research on personality organization, several gaps remain. Most psychometric studies of the IPO have been conducted in Western populations, and relatively little is known about the factor structure of the brief version of the instrument in non-Western cultural contexts. Given the substantial influence of cultural norms, values, interpersonal expectations, and self-concept development on personality functioning, it cannot be assumed that the original factor structure will necessarily replicate in different societies (Ellison & Levy, 2012; Sagstetter et al., 2020). Moreover, the convergence of personality organization measures with DSM-5 maladaptive personality traits requires further examination to clarify the extent to which these frameworks capture overlapping versus distinct aspects of personality pathology.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to examine the factorial structure of the Brief Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-30) in an Iranian community sample and to investigate its convergence with DSM-5 maladaptive personality traits and dimensions of personality organization assessed through the Structured Interview of Personality Organization (STIPO).

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the factorial structure of the Brief Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-30) and its relationship with DSM-5 maladaptive personality traits. The target population consisted of individuals from the general population who were recruited from public parks. A convenience sampling method was used, and participation was entirely voluntary. The final sample included 162 participants, comprising 47 men and 115 women, with ages ranging from 17 to 66 years. Data collection was conducted in a field setting. After establishing rapport with potential

participants and obtaining their informed consent, trained researchers administered a structured clinical interview and distributed the study questionnaires for completion. All participants completed the assessment battery individually, and the collected data were subsequently used for psychometric and correlational analyses.

2.2. Measures

The Structured Interview of Personality Organization (STIPO) was used as a clinician-administered assessment instrument based on Kernberg's psychodynamic model of personality organization. The STIPO is a semi-structured interview designed to evaluate key domains of personality functioning, including identity integration, object relations, primitive defenses, coping and adaptive functioning, aggression, moral values, and reality testing. Consisting of 86 interview questions, the instrument provides a comprehensive assessment of both the observable behavioral world and the subjective inner experiences of the individual. One of the principal strengths of the STIPO is that it allows experienced clinicians to integrate their clinical judgment into the assessment process while maintaining a standardized framework. The interview facilitates the evaluation of personality organization across neurotic, borderline, and psychotic levels of functioning. Items are rated according to specific scoring criteria, and in the present study, the five-point rating system was employed to evaluate the severity of personality pathology and level of psychological functioning across domains. Previous research has demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and meaningful associations between STIPO dimensions and other established measures of personality organization.

The 30-item Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-30) was administered as a self-report measure of personality organization derived from Kernberg's object relations theory. The original IPO consisted of 83 items assessing identity diffusion, primitive defenses, reality testing, aggression, and moral values. The abbreviated 30-item version was developed to provide a more efficient assessment while retaining the theoretical foundations of the original instrument. In this version, each domain is represented by five items, and the measure adopts a two-factor conceptualization of personality organization. Previous studies have indicated that the IPO-30 captures both a general personality functioning factor and specific dimensions related to identity diffusion, primitive defenses, reality testing, aggression, and moral value integration. The

instrument has been shown to possess satisfactory psychometric properties and has been widely used in studies examining personality pathology and structural personality functioning. Participants responded to all items according to their personal experiences and perceptions, and the resulting scores were used to evaluate the factorial structure and validity of the instrument within the Iranian population.

The Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (PID-5) was utilized to assess maladaptive personality traits according to the dimensional model of personality pathology proposed in DSM-5. Unlike traditional categorical personality assessments, the PID-5 adopts a dimensional approach that evaluates pathological personality characteristics across multiple domains. The short-form version used in this study consisted of 25 items measuring five higher-order maladaptive trait domains: Negative Affectivity, Detachment, Antagonism, Disinhibition, and Psychoticism. Responses were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("very false or often false") to 3 ("very true or often true"), with some items requiring reverse scoring. The PID-5 has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across different populations, including satisfactory reliability, construct validity, and convergent validity with major personality models such as the Five-Factor Model. Previous studies have reported overall reliability coefficients of approximately .86 and internal consistency estimates ranging from .76 to .89 across trait domains. The instrument was included in the present study to examine the convergent validity of the personality organization dimensions identified through factor analytic procedures.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis coefficients, were calculated to examine the distributional characteristics of the study variables and determine the

suitability of the data for multivariate analyses. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationships among the dimensions of personality organization, maladaptive personality traits, and STIPO domains. To evaluate the factorial structure of the IPO-30, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first conducted using AMOS version 24 to test the fit of the original two-factor model. Model fit was assessed using multiple fit indices, including the chi-square statistic, chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Following inadequate model fit, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component extraction and rotated factor solutions was performed to identify the underlying factor structure of the questionnaire in the Iranian sample. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the extracted factors. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 23 and AMOS version 24.

3. Findings and Results

The findings are presented in accordance with the study objectives. First, descriptive statistics were examined to assess the distributional characteristics of the questionnaire items and study variables. Subsequently, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the fit of the original two-factor model of the Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-30). Because the proposed model did not demonstrate acceptable fit, exploratory factor analysis was performed to identify the underlying factor structure within the Iranian sample. Finally, convergent validity was examined through correlations with maladaptive personality traits measured by the PID-5 and structural personality dimensions assessed through the STIPO interview.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Skewness, and Kurtosis of the IPO-30 Items

Item	M (SD)	Skewness (Kurtosis)	Item	M (SD)	Skewness (Kurtosis)
1	2.38 (0.93)	0.32 (-0.33)	16	1.72 (0.91)	1.35 (1.59)
2	3.14 (1.04)	-0.14 (-0.51)	17	1.73 (0.88)	1.28 (1.66)
3	2.33 (1.02)	-0.30 (-0.55)	18	2.64 (1.09)	0.32 (-0.50)
4	2.38 (1.06)	0.55 (-0.17)	19	1.41 (0.66)	1.04 (1.28)
5	2.98 (0.94)	0.08 (-0.02)	20	1.64 (0.86)	1.61 (1.78)
6	2.80 (1.02)	0.10 (-0.56)	21	1.69 (0.87)	1.36 (1.61)
7	3.12 (1.04)	-0.14 (-0.52)	22	1.81 (0.95)	1.21 (-1.19)

8	2.38 (0.85)	-0.53 (-0.07)	23	1.36 (0.61)	1.83 (1.37)
9	2.23 (0.93)	0.48 (-0.19)	24	1.86 (0.94)	0.84 (-0.07)
10	2.52 (1.08)	0.31 (-0.61)	25	2.64 (1.35)	0.23 (-1.26)
11	2.88 (1.22)	0.19 (-0.75)	26	1.43 (0.68)	0.92 (-1.18)
12	3.40 (0.94)	-0.36 (-0.12)	27	2.31 (1.07)	0.49 (-0.42)
13	1.93 (0.83)	0.60 (-0.23)	28	3.01 (1.22)	0.09 (-0.84)
14	1.81 (0.94)	1.20 (1.06)	29	3.45 (1.29)	-0.53 (-0.61)
15	1.64 (0.78)	1.12 (0.84)	30	2.67 (1.06)	0.10 (-0.68)

As shown in Table 1, the highest mean score was observed for Item 29 ($M = 3.45$), whereas the lowest mean score was observed for Item 19 ($M = 1.41$). Examination of skewness and kurtosis indices indicated that all values fell

within the acceptable range of ± 2 , suggesting that the distributions of all questionnaire items approximated normality and were suitable for subsequent parametric analyses.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for STIPO Dimensions

Variable	Mean	SD
Identity	2.58	0.745
Object Relations	2.34	0.741
Primitive Defenses	2.66	0.715
Coping Rigidity/Personality Rigidity	2.28	0.921
Aggression	1.84	0.722
Moral Values	1.72	0.573

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the STIPO dimensions. Primitive Defenses demonstrated the highest mean score ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.72$), followed by Identity ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.75$). Moral Values exhibited the lowest mean

score ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.57$). Overall, the findings indicate moderate levels of personality organization dimensions within the sample.

Table 3

Fit Indices for the Original Two-Factor Model of the IPO-30

Fit Index	Value
χ^2	1323.01
df	404
χ^2/df	3.28
GFI	0.563
AGFI	0.497
CFI	0.549
RMSEA	0.119

As shown in Table 3, confirmatory factor analysis did not support the original two-factor structure of the IPO-30. The obtained fit indices were below accepted thresholds for adequate model fit, including $GFI = 0.563$, $AGFI = 0.497$, $CFI = 0.549$, and $RMSEA = 0.119$. Furthermore, the χ^2/df

ratio of 3.28 exceeded the optimal range. These results indicate that the original two-factor model did not adequately represent the data collected from the Iranian sample.

Table 4

Rotated Factor Loadings of the IPO-30 in the Initial Exploratory Factor Analysis

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
14	.895			
15	.865			
16	.852			
13	.767			
17	.735			
28		.796		
30		.742		
29		.681		
12		.668		
25		.652		
27		.582		
18	.407	.518		
23			.733	
21			.717	
20			.702	
22			.662	
24			.659	
19			.649	
26			.620	
3				.732
9				.692
10				.634
8				.614
4				.553
6				.529
2				.452

The initial exploratory factor analysis revealed a four-factor solution. However, Items 1, 7, and 11 did not load substantially on any factor, while Item 18 demonstrated problematic cross-loading on both Factors 1 and 2, with

loadings exceeding 0.40 on each factor. Consequently, these items were removed and the analysis was repeated to obtain a cleaner and more interpretable factor structure.

Table 5

Final Rotated Factor Loadings for the 26-Item IPO Structure

Factor	Eigenvalue	% Variance Explained
Factor 1	6.49	24.96
Factor 2	3.50	13.45
Factor 3	2.34	9.01
Factor 4	2.00	7.71

The final exploratory factor analysis retained 26 items and yielded a stable four-factor structure. Factor 1 consisted of Items 13–17, Factor 2 included Items 5, 12, 25, 27, 28, 29, and 30, Factor 3 comprised Items 19–24 and 26, and Factor 4 included Items 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10. Based on conceptual

similarities among the items, the four factors were labeled Reality Testing, Moral Values, Aggression, and Defense & Identity, respectively. Together, these factors accounted for a substantial proportion of the total variance in personality organization.

Table 6

Correlations Between IPO Factors and PID-5 Domains

PID-5 Domain	M	SD	α	AA	BB	CC	DD
Negative Affectivity	11.23	3.35	.80	.26**	.46**	.21**	.40**
Detachment	9.85	3.09	.76	.31**	.25**	.23**	.34**
Antagonism	8.51	2.44	.69	.35**	.21**	.53**	.45**
Disinhibition	9.67	2.92	.78	.40**	.37**	.42**	.54**
Psychoticism	8.97	2.84	.72	.53**	.48**	.46**	.46**

As shown in Table 6, all extracted IPO factors demonstrated significant positive correlations with all five maladaptive personality trait domains measured by the PID-5 ($p < .01$). Correlation coefficients ranged from .21 to .54, with the strongest association observed between the Defense

& Identity factor (DD) and Disinhibition ($r = .54$), and between the Reality Testing factor (AA) and Psychoticism ($r = .53$). These findings provide strong evidence for the convergent validity of the extracted personality organization dimensions.

Table 7

Correlations Between IPO Factors and STIPO Dimensions

STIPO Dimension	M	SD	AA	BB	CC	DD
Identity	2.58	0.75	-.03	.02	-.11	.01
Object Relations	2.34	0.74	.04	-.07	-.01	-.03
Primitive Defenses	2.66	0.72	.03	.06	.04	.06
Personality Rigidity	2.28	0.92	-.01	-.04	-.14	-.12
Aggression	1.84	0.72	.02	-.11	-.09	-.08
Moral Values	1.72	0.57	-.01	-.19*	-.08	-.02

Table 7 indicates that, with the exception of one statistically significant association, correlations between the IPO factors and STIPO dimensions were generally weak and nonsignificant. Specifically, the Moral Values factor (BB) showed a small but significant negative correlation with the STIPO Moral Values dimension ($r = -.19$, $p < .05$). No other relationships reached statistical significance. These findings suggest limited correspondence between the self-report IPO structure and clinician-rated STIPO dimensions within the present sample.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the factorial structure of the Brief Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-30) in an Iranian sample and to investigate its convergence with DSM-5 maladaptive personality traits and dimensions assessed through the Structured Interview of Personality Organization (STIPO). The findings revealed that the original two-factor structure proposed for the IPO-30 did not demonstrate an acceptable fit to the collected data. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated poor model fit across all major indices, suggesting that the latent structure identified in previous studies could not be directly replicated

within the Iranian population. This finding highlights the importance of cultural and contextual influences on the manifestation and assessment of personality organization. Although the brief version of the IPO was originally developed to operationalize a two-factor conceptualization of personality organization, the current results suggest that the organization of personality pathology in Iranian individuals may be represented by a more differentiated latent structure. These findings are consistent with the broader psychometric literature indicating that personality constructs often exhibit cross-cultural variability and that factor structures derived in one population may not necessarily generalize to another (Sagstetter et al., 2020). Similarly, the results align with those reported by Ellison and Levy, who found discrepancies between the theoretically proposed structure of the IPO and the empirically derived factor solution in a nonclinical sample, suggesting that the underlying organization of personality pathology may be more complex than originally assumed (Ellison & Levy, 2012). Furthermore, studies examining abbreviated versions of the IPO have noted that factor solutions may vary according to sample characteristics, language adaptations, and cultural context (Zimmermann et al., 2015). Consequently, the rejection of the original two-factor model

in the present study should not be viewed as evidence against the construct of personality organization itself, but rather as support for the necessity of continued psychometric refinement and cultural validation of assessment instruments.

The exploratory factor analysis conducted following the rejection of the original model yielded a four-factor solution consisting of Reality Testing, Moral Values, Aggression, and Defense & Identity. This finding represents one of the most important contributions of the present study because it suggests that the latent structure of personality organization may be represented differently within the Iranian cultural context. The emergence of Reality Testing as a distinct factor is theoretically meaningful because reality testing has consistently been regarded as one of the fundamental dimensions of personality organization within Kernberg's framework. Individuals with more severe personality pathology often experience difficulties distinguishing internal experiences from external reality, making this dimension central to the assessment of personality functioning (Clarkin & Kernberg, 2015; Sadock et al., 2017). The identification of a separate Moral Values factor is also noteworthy because moral functioning has increasingly been recognized as a crucial aspect of personality organization, particularly in relation to internalized standards, self-regulation, and interpersonal responsibility (Sagstetter et al., 2020). The Aggression factor similarly corresponds to theoretical conceptualizations emphasizing the regulation of hostile impulses and aggressive affect as core features of personality pathology (Yun et al., 2024). Finally, the combined Defense & Identity factor suggests a close relationship between identity integration and defensive functioning within this sample. This finding may reflect the dynamic interaction between self-concept stability and defensive operations proposed by psychodynamic theories, whereby disturbances in identity are often accompanied by increased reliance on primitive defenses (Clarkin & Kernberg, 2015; Preti et al., 2015). The extraction of these four dimensions is broadly consistent with Kernberg's structural model while simultaneously suggesting that some theoretically distinct domains may function as integrated constructs within this population.

Another important finding was the satisfactory internal consistency demonstrated by all four extracted factors. Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded the conventional threshold for acceptable reliability, indicating that the items within each factor measured coherent and internally consistent constructs. The highest reliability coefficient was

observed for the Reality Testing factor, suggesting that this domain may represent a particularly stable and clearly defined aspect of personality organization. These results are consistent with previous psychometric studies reporting adequate reliability for IPO scales and their abbreviated forms (Sagstetter et al., 2020; Zimmermann et al., 2015). Reliable measurement is particularly important in personality assessment because the constructs being evaluated are relatively stable and enduring psychological characteristics. The present findings therefore provide additional support for the use of the revised four-factor structure in future research and clinical assessment within Iranian populations. The results also align with studies demonstrating that dimensions derived from Kernberg's model can be measured reliably across diverse populations and clinical settings (Horz-Sagstetter et al., 2017; Preti et al., 2018).

The examination of convergent validity produced highly meaningful findings. All extracted factors of the revised IPO structure demonstrated significant positive correlations with the five maladaptive personality trait domains measured by the PID-5, including Negative Affectivity, Detachment, Antagonism, Disinhibition, and Psychoticism. These results provide strong support for the convergent validity of the extracted dimensions and suggest that personality organization is closely related to contemporary dimensional models of personality pathology. The observed relationships are theoretically consistent with the DSM-5 Alternative Model for Personality Disorders, which conceptualizes personality pathology in terms of both impairments in personality functioning and maladaptive personality traits (American Psychiatric, 2013; Amini, 2018). For example, the positive association between Reality Testing and Psychoticism is consistent with theoretical expectations because deficits in reality testing are conceptually linked to unusual perceptions, distorted cognitions, and psychosis-proneness (Clarkin & Kernberg, 2015; Sagstetter et al., 2020). Likewise, the relationships between Aggression and Antagonism reflect shared underlying mechanisms involving hostility, interpersonal conflict, and difficulties regulating aggressive impulses (Wright et al., 2012). The associations between Defense & Identity and Disinhibition may indicate that identity diffusion and maladaptive defensive functioning contribute to impulsive and poorly regulated behavior. Similar patterns have been reported in studies examining the convergence between psychodynamic and trait-based models of personality pathology (Thomas et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2012). The current findings therefore

support the growing consensus that psychodynamic concepts of personality organization and dimensional trait models describe overlapping aspects of personality dysfunction from complementary theoretical perspectives.

The positive associations between the extracted IPO dimensions and all PID-5 domains further underscore the clinical significance of personality organization. Contemporary research has increasingly demonstrated that disturbances in personality organization are associated with a wide range of maladaptive outcomes, including emotional dysregulation, self-harm, interpersonal instability, pathological narcissism, and difficulties in reflective functioning (Newcomb et al., 2024; Sepahvand et al., 2025). Studies have also shown that deficits in personality organization are linked to borderline personality features and are influenced by childhood adversity, attachment insecurity, and impaired mentalizing capacities (Kurt & Çakır, 2025). The present findings therefore support the relevance of personality organization as a transdiagnostic construct that captures broad aspects of psychological dysfunction beyond specific diagnostic categories. Moreover, the significant correlations with all five maladaptive trait domains suggest that personality organization may represent a higher-order structural framework underlying diverse manifestations of personality pathology.

An unexpected finding emerged from the analysis of relationships between the revised IPO factors and the STIPO dimensions. Contrary to expectations, most correlations between the two instruments were nonsignificant, with the exception of a small negative relationship between the Moral Values factor and the STIPO Moral Values dimension. This finding differs from previous research indicating substantial correspondence between self-report and clinician-rated measures of personality organization (Horz-Sagstetter et al., 2017; Preti et al., 2018). Several explanations may account for this discrepancy. First, self-report measures and clinician-administered interviews assess personality functioning through fundamentally different methodologies. Self-report instruments rely on participants' conscious self-perceptions, whereas structured interviews allow clinicians to evaluate both explicit responses and implicit aspects of functioning. Consequently, discrepancies may arise due to limited self-awareness, social desirability, defensive responding, or difficulties accurately evaluating one's own psychological functioning. Second, cultural factors may influence how individuals interpret and respond to self-report items related to identity, morality, and interpersonal

functioning. Third, the revised four-factor structure identified in the present study differs from the original theoretical organization of the IPO, which may reduce direct correspondence with the domains assessed by the STIPO. Similar challenges in establishing convergence across assessment modalities have been reported in personality assessment research more broadly (Hemmati, 2018; Preti et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the significant associations with DSM-5 maladaptive traits indicate that the revised IPO structure retains meaningful clinical relevance despite its limited convergence with the interview-based assessment.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the findings contribute to the growing literature supporting the multidimensional assessment of personality pathology and reinforce the importance of evaluating personality organization as a core aspect of psychological functioning. The results suggest that personality organization may be conceptualized as a culturally sensitive construct whose latent structure can vary across populations while maintaining meaningful relationships with broader indicators of personality pathology. The identification of a reliable four-factor model and its substantial associations with maladaptive personality traits provide evidence for the usefulness of the revised instrument in assessing personality functioning within Iranian populations. Furthermore, the findings support contemporary efforts to integrate psychodynamic and dimensional approaches to personality assessment by demonstrating meaningful convergence between personality organization and DSM-5 maladaptive trait domains.

One limitation of the present study concerns the use of a convenience sample drawn from the general population, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to clinical populations and other demographic groups. In addition, the sample size, although adequate for the conducted analyses, may not have been sufficient to fully capture the complexity of personality organization across different subgroups. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study, which prevents conclusions regarding causal relationships or developmental processes. The reliance on self-report measures alongside interview-based assessments may also have introduced method variance and response biases.

Future research should replicate the present findings using larger and more diverse samples, including clinical populations with diagnosed personality disorders.

Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the stability of the identified four-factor structure over time and its predictive validity for psychological outcomes. Researchers may also investigate measurement invariance across gender, age groups, and cultural contexts to determine the generalizability of the revised model. Additional studies exploring the relationships among personality organization, attachment patterns, mentalization, emotion regulation, and psychopathology would further enhance understanding of the construct.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that the revised four-factor version of the IPO may serve as a useful screening and assessment tool for evaluating structural aspects of personality functioning. Mental health professionals may benefit from incorporating personality organization assessments into clinical evaluations to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of patients' identity integration, defensive functioning, aggression regulation, and reality testing capacities. The identified dimensions may also inform treatment planning, case formulation, and intervention selection by highlighting specific areas of structural vulnerability. Finally, the integration of personality organization assessment with dimensional personality trait models may facilitate more personalized and theoretically informed approaches to psychological assessment and treatment.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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