

THE WETC PSYCHOLOGY NEWSLETTER

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“Impossible” MMPI-2 Scores and Their Consequences for Litigation

Psychological testing is a major source of data in every credible psychological and psychiatric examination and the cornerstone is typically the Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). The original Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory was developed in 1939 and the MMPI-2 is the 1989 revision of that test. A majority of the psychologists and psychiatrists who are working in the medical-legal area appear to be using the MMPI-2 in preference to the MMPI. However there is a growing body of research literature that indicates that the MMPI-2 may not be as valid an instrument as the original MMPI. The reason for this is quite simple. There are three validity scales and ten clinical scales on both the MMPI and MMPI-2. Once the validity scale scores demonstrate that a person has been shown to be responding to the MMPI-2 items in an honest and frank manner, statements are made about the patient's psychological status by looking at the pattern of scoring on the highest two or three clinical scale scores. Research on the meaning of the clinical scale scores dates back to the 1930's. However, there is a growing body of published literature indicating that research done on the MMPI that shows a relationship between the individual's clinical scale scores and their psychological status may not be applicable to the MMPI-2 (e.g., Greene, R.L., The MMPI-2/MMPI An Interpretive Manual, Second Edition, Boston, Allyn & Bacon, 2000).

Further, support for the conclusion that the MMPI-2 may not be an effective instrument comes from the test publishers, the University of Minnesota Press. Specifically, in July, 2008 they published the MMPI-2-Restructured Form (MMPI-2-RF). Essentially, the publication of the MMPI-2-RF was tantamount to admitting that the MMPI-2 was inadequate and needed help. Unfortunately, the process of independent research conducted by professionals who are not associated with the publication, distribution, marketing or sale of either the MMPI-2 or MMPI-2-RF has not yet demonstrated that either the MMPI-2 or the

“experience has shown that a significant percentage of the MMPI-2 scores that appear in medical-legal reports are impossible to obtain and therefore demonstrably erroneous.”

MMPI-2-RF can provide an accurate portrayal of an individual's psychological status. Nevertheless, the MMPI-2 has many proponents who depend on the test to provide information about the individual's test-taking attitudes and credibility as well as the existence of any psychopathology.

Putting aside the question of the validity of the MMPI-2 in assessing the psychological status of litigants, experience has shown that a significant percentage of the MMPI-2 scores that appear in medical-legal reports are impossible to obtain and therefore demonstrably erroneous. In order to understand this comment it is necessary to explore the manner in which the test scores are obtained and reported.

The MMPI-2 has 567 true-false questions. There are many books devoted solely to the scoring and interpretation of the MMPI-2. These books, as well as thousands of published research articles, discuss a very large number of scales that research has shown have various meanings about an individual's psychological status. A “scale” is simply a collection of items. Since there are “only” 567 questions on the MMPI-2, any given question may appear on a very large number of scales. However, the scoring of the test requires that the doctor calculate scores on at least the 13 basic scales. Specifically, there are three validity scales, the L, F and K, and 10 clinical scales, whose names we need not consider at this point.

The above discussion notwithstanding, each scale can be scored in one of two ways. Let's say that a mythical scale contains 20 questions and that we need to know how many of those questions were answered “false,” how many were answered “true,” and how many were unanswered. The first scoring method involves putting a simple paper template on top of the patient's answer sheet and counting the number of times the patient answered, for example, “false.” The second method involves using a computer program to enter each of the

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answers to the 567 questions twice, and letting the computer find any data entry errors and calculate the scores. While mistakes can occur using either method, the second has a much lower error frequency and is therefore preferable.

In writing the psychological testing section of a report it is good form to provide the patient's test scores so that the reader and the court can review the doctor's conclusions or opinions. In fact, in some jurisdictions this is a legal requirement. Unfortunately, a significantly large number of psychological reports provide MMPI-2 scores that are impossible to obtain. In this regard, the testing manual for the MMPI-2 provides all of the possible scores for the major scales of the test (Hathaway, S.R. & McKinley, J.C., Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 Manual for Administration and Scoring. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). However, an inspection of that manual indicates that the scales are not numerically continuous. For example, a woman can obtain a Depression Scale T-Score of 86 and a Depression Scale T-Score of 83. Clearly, it is not possible for a woman to obtain a Depression Scale T-Score of either 84 or 85! What then can be said of Dr. Jones's report when he states, "Ms. Brown received a Depression Scale T-Score of 84?" Well clearly, Dr. Jones has made a substantial error in scoring and/or reporting Ms. Brown's Depression Scale T-Score. However, for at least two reasons, once Dr. Jones has made this error it is not possible to conclude that anything that Dr. Jones has said about Ms. Brown's MMPI-2 performance is credible.

First, once a single error is found we do not know what other mistakes are present in the data. Essentially, even though it may be possible for a woman to get all of the other 12 scores, we do not know if those scores are accurate. All we know is that the doctor's methodology produces some errors.

Second, and most importantly, if one score is wrong and we do not know the correct score, regardless of which of the 13 scores is wrong, the entire interpretation of an MMPI-2 can change if just one score is changed. Accordingly, if a doctor who is caught with a single erroneous score attempts to maintain that the score on that scale is irrelevant to the interpretation of the test, they are just simply wrong. Specifically, if one is allowed to put in any score in place of the wrong score, that score will change the

entire interpretation. Thus, anything the doctor has said following the reporting of a single impossible score is completely indefensible. How interesting!!!! But perhaps even more interesting for the litigation process is that once the MMPI-2 is "thrown out" a large part, if not all of, the objective data regarding the litigant's condition is gone and cannot be retrieved!

Now, as discussed below, helping the court, attorneys and claims adjusters find out whether or not the doctor has made a fatal error is a simple process.

Instructions for Finding out if an MMPI-2 T-Score is Possible

In order to determine if an MMPI-2 T-Score is possible you first have to identify which of the 13 scales you are interested in. As noted above, there are 3 validity scales and 10 clinical scales. The three validity scales are L, F and K. The names of the 10 clinical scales are given below and are identified by their full names, their abbreviations and their numbers. A list of the 13 scales is given below. Obviously, each must be checked for accuracy.

Validity Scales

Lie Scale - L
F Scale - F
K Scale - K

Clinical Scales

Hypochondriasis - Hs - 1
Depression - D - 2
Hysteria - Hy - 3
Psychopathic Deviate - Pd - 4
Masculinity- Femininity - Mf - 5
Paranoia - Pa - 6
Psychasthenia - Pt - 7
Schizophrenia - Sc - 8
Hypomania - Ma - 9
Social Introversion - Si - 0

The numbers within the tables appearing on the next two pages contain all of the possible T-Scores that can be gotten on the MMPI-2. Table 1 is for males and Table 2 is for females. These numbers were obtained from pages 54 and 55 of the 1989 Hathaway & McKinley MMPI-2 testing manual, cited above.

Obviously, when cross-examining a doctor on the stand or in a deposition it would be strongly recommended to have a copy of that testing manual, which can be purchased from Pearson Assessments at www.pearsonassessments.com (800-627-7271).

In order to determine if a T-Score is possible the first thing you need to do is determine if the person who was tested is a male or a female as there are different sets of normative data for the genders.

Next you determine which scale you are interested in. For the sake of discussion let's deal with Scale 2, the Depression Scale (D), and assume that we are dealing with a male examinee, Mr. Smith. Let's say the doctor reported that Mr. Smith received a Depression (D) scale T-Score 53. To determine if it is possible for a male to get this score you enter Table 1 and work your way up or down the vertical column headed by the "D" to the 50's. Now you'll discover that it is not possible for a male to get a T-Score of 53 on the Depression Scale (D) of the MMPI-2. The scale is not continuous. While it is possible to get a T-Score of 52 or a score of 54, it is not possible to get a T-Score of 53.

Once you have determined that the doctor reported a score that is not possible it is reasonable to conclude the doctor has made a monumental error in the scoring and/or the reporting of Mr. Smith's MMPI-2 scores and therefore in the interpretation of his scores. However, regardless of how this error was made, it is obvious that such an error constitutes a substantial flaw in the doctor's report and one that precludes drawing any inferences about Mr. Smith's psychological status from the MMPI-2.

In conclusion, while the usefulness of the MMPI-2 in litigated cases is open to discussion, the reporting of impossible scores is a frequent occurrence, which when it takes place, demonstrates the complete lack of credibility in the doctor's methods and interpretations. Accordingly, this behooves the courts, attorneys and claims examiners involved to always check the reported MMPI-2 scores to determine those that are clearly erroneous and have resulted in a flawed interpretation of an individual's psychiatric condition.

This is the sixteenth of a series of monthly newsletters aimed at providing information about psychological evaluations and treatment that may be of interest to attorneys and insurance adjusters working in the areas of workers' compensation and personal injury. If you have not received some or all of our past newsletters, and would like copies, send us an email requesting the newsletter(s) that you would like forwarded to you.

Table 1. All of the Possible MMPI-2 T-Scores for the Three Basic Validity Scales (L, F & K) and the Ten Clinical Scales for Males.

Males															
Raw Scores	L*	F*	K*	Hs (1)	D (2)	Hy (3)	Pd (4)	Mf* (5)	Pa (6)	Pt (7)	Sc (8)	Ma (9)	Si* (0)	Raw Scores	
73														73	
72														72	
71														71	
70														70	
69													100	69	
68													99	68	
67											120		98	67	
66											118		97	66	
65											117		96	65	
64											115		94	64	
63											113		93	63	
62											111		92	62	
61											110		91	61	
60										120	108		90	60	
59										119	106		89	59	
58											117	105		87	58
57											115	103		86	57
56								109			113	101		85	56
55					120			107			111	99		84	55
54					119			105			109	98		83	54
53					117			103			106	96		82	53
52					115			101			104	94		80	52
51					114		120	99			102	93		79	51
50					112	120	117	97			100	91		78	50
49					110	119	115	95			98	89		77	49
48					108	116	112	93			96	87		76	48
47					106	114	110	91			94	86		75	47
46					104	111	107	89			91	84		73	46
45					102	109	105	87			89	82		72	45
44			120		100	106	102	85			87	81		71	44
43				119	98	104	100	83			85	79	120	70	43
42				116	97	101	97	81			83	77	117	69	42
41				114	95	99	95	79			81	75	114	68	41
40				112	93	96	92	78			79	74	110	66	40
39				110	91	94	90	76			77	72	107	65	39
38				108	89	91	87	74			74	70	104	64	38
37				105	87	89	84	72			72	69	101	63	37
36				103	85	86	82	70			70	67	98	62	36
35				101	83	84	79	68			68	65	94	61	35
34				99	81	81	77	66			66	63	91	59	34
33				97	80	79	74	64			64	62	88	58	33
32				94	78	76	72	62			62	60	85	57	32
31				92	76	74	69	60			59	58	81	56	31
30			81	90	74	71	67	58	120		57	56	78	55	30
29			79	88	72	69	64	56	119		55	55	75	54	29
28		120	77	86	70	66	62	54	116	53	53	72	52	28	
27		119	75	84	68	64	59	52	112	51	51	69	51	27	
26		116	72	81	66	61	57	50	108	49	49	65	50	26	
25		113	70	79	64	59	54	48	105	47	47	62	49	25	
24		110	68	77	62	57	52	46	101	44	45	59	48	24	
23		107	66	75	61	54	50	44	97	43	44	56	47	23	
22		104	64	73	59	52	48	42	94	41	42	53	45	22	
21		101	62	70	57	50	46	40	90	39	40	51	44	21	
20		98	60	68	54	47	44	38	86	37	39	49	43	20	
19		95	58	66	52	45	42	36	83	36	37	47	42	19	
18		92	56	64	50	43	40	34	79	34	36	45	41	18	
17		89	54	62	47	42	39	32	75	33	35	43	40	17	
16		85	51	59	45	40	37	30	72	32	34	41	38	16	
15	100	82	49	57	42	38	35		68	31	33	39	37	15	
14	96	79	47	54	40	37	34		64	30	32	38	36	14	
13	91	76	45	51	38	35	33		61		31	36	35	13	
12	87	73	43	48	36	34	31		57		30	35	34	12	
11	83	70	41	45	34	33	30		53			33	33	11	
10	78	67	39	42	32	32			49			31	31	10	
9	74	64	37	39	30	31			46			30	30	9	
8	70	61	35	37		30			42					8	
7	65	58	33	35					39					7	
6	61	55	30	33					37					6	
5	56	51		32					34					5	
4	52	48		31					32					4	
3	48	45		31					31					3	
2	43	42		30					30					2	
1	39	39												1	
0	35	36												0	
Raw Scores	L*	F*	K*	Hs (1)	D (2)	Hy (3)	Pd (4)	Mf* (5)	Pa (6)	Pt (7)	Sc (8)	Ma (9)	Si* (0)	Raw Scores	

Table 2. All of the Possible MMPI-2 T-Scores for the Three Basic Validity Scales (L, F & K) and the Ten Clinical Scales for Females.

Females														
Raw Scores	L*	F*	K*	Hs (1)	D (2)	Hy (3)	Pd (4)	Mf* (5)	Pa (6)	Pt (7)	Sc (8)	Ma (9)	Si* (0)	Raw Scores
73											120			73
72											119			72
71											118			71
70											116			70
69											115		95	69
68											113		94	68
67											112		93	67
66										120	111		91	66
65										119	109		90	65
64										117	108		89	64
63										115	106		88	63
62										114	105		87	62
61										112	103		86	61
60										110	102		85	60
59										108	100		84	59
58										106	99		83	58
57										105	97		82	57
56										103	96		81	56
55										101	94		79	55
54										99	93		78	54
53					120					97	91		77	53
52					118	120				95	90		76	52
51					116	118				94	88		75	51
50					114	115	120			92	87		74	50
49					112	113	118			90	85		73	49
48					109	111	115			88	84		72	48
47					107	108	113			86	82		71	47
46				120	105	106	110			84	81		70	46
45				118	103	104	107			83	79		69	45
44				116	101	101	105	30		81	78	120	67	44
43				113	99	99	102	33		79	76	118	66	43
42				111	96	96	100	35		77	75	115	65	42
41				109	94	94	97	38		75	73	112	64	41
40				107	92	92	94	40		73	72	109	63	40
39				105	90	89	92	43		72	70	106	62	39
38				103	88	87	89	45		70	69	103	61	38
37				101	86	84	87	47		68	67	100	60	37
36				99	83	82	84	50		66	66	97	59	36
35				97	81	80	81	52		64	65	94	58	35
34				95	79	77	79	55		62	63	91	57	34
33				92	77	75	76	57		61	62	88	55	33
32				90	75	73	73	60		59	60	85	54	32
31				88	72	70	71	62		57	59	82	53	31
30			83	86	70	68	68	65	120	55	57	79	52	30
29			81	84	68	65	66	67	118	53	55	76	51	29
28			78	82	66	63	63	69	114	51	53	74	50	28
27			76	80	64	61	60	72	111	49	52	71	49	27
26			74	78	62	58	58	74	107	47	50	68	48	26
25			72	76	59	56	55	77	103	44	48	65	47	25
24		120	70	74	57	54	53	79	100	42	46	62	46	24
23		116	67	71	55	51	51	82	96	40	44	59	45	23
22		113	65	69	53	49	49	84	92	39	42	56	43	22
21		109	63	67	51	47	47	87	89	37	41	53	42	21
20		106	61	65	49	45	45	89	85	35	39	51	41	20
19		103	59	63	47	43	43	92	81	34	37	49	40	19
18		99	56	61	46	41	41	94	78	32	36	47	39	18
17		96	54	59	44	39	39	96	74	31	34	45	38	17
16		92	52	57	42	38	37	99	70	30	33	43	37	16
15	105	89	50	54	40	36	36	101	67		32	41	36	15
14	100	85	48	51	38	35	34	104	63		31	39	35	14
13	95	82	46	49	36	34	32	106	59		30	37	34	13
12	90	79	43	46	34	32	30	109	56			35	33	12
11	86	75	41	43	32	32		111	52			33	32	11
10	81	72	39	40	30	31		114	49			31	30	10
9	76	68	37	38		30		116	45			30		9
8	71	65	35	35				118	42					8
7	66	61	32	33				120	39					7
6	62	58	30	30					37					6
5	57	55							34					5
4	52	51							32					4
3	47	48							31					3
2	43	44							30					2
1	38	41												1
0	33	37												0
Raw Scores	L*	F*	K*	Hs (1)	D (2)	Hy (3)	Pd (4)	Mf* (5)	Pa (6)	Pt (7)	Sc (8)	Ma (9)	Si* (0)	Raw Scores