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The Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents: Validation of the Italian Version

Matilde Sparacino^{1*}, Lisa De Luca¹, Annalaura Nocentini¹

¹*Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literature and Psychology,
University of Florence, Florence, Italy*

Abstract

Breakup distress refers to the emotional suffering experienced after the end of a romantic relationship, a phenomenon particularly relevant during adolescence. However, few validated tools exist to assess breakup-related distress in this population. This study presents a validation of the Italian version of the Breakup Distress Scale (BDS) for adolescents through two studies. In Study 1, we adapted the adult's version of the BDS for the adolescent population (BDS-A) testing its unidimensional structure through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in a sample of 164 adolescents. Findings supported the unidimensional structure, showing strong internal consistency and an acceptable model fit. In study 2, a revised scale (BDS-AR) was developed and administered to 323 youths using a 5-point Likert scale and adding time references to address the nuances of distress perception over time. Both studies confirm the validity of a single-factor structure for the BDS-AR in adolescents. Besides, the possibility to measure the level of stress in reference to two different periods after the breakup constitutes an improvement in the field of the post-break up stress measurement. In conclusion, the Italian BDS-AR offers a psychometrically sound tool for assessing breakup distress in adolescents. It facilitates early identification of at-risk youth and provides a solid foundation for future research on the longitudinal evolution of distress and its correlates in this developmental period.

Keywords: Breakup Distress; Adolescence; Romantic Relationships; Confirmatory Factor Analysis

*Corresponding author.

Matilde Sparacino
Department of Education, Languages,
Interculture, Literature and Psychology,
University of Florence,
Florence, Italy
E-mail: matilde.sparacino@unifi.it
(M. Sparacino)

Introduction

In the developmental journey that characterizes adolescence and young adulthood, interpersonal relationships assume a role of fundamental importance. Among these, romantic relationships emerge as a key experience for individual and social development, offering a privileged context for the exploration and construction of identity, as well as for the learning of emotional and relational skills (Collins, 2003; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Romantic relationships during adolescence not only provide a context for intimacy and emotional regulation but also play a critical role in identity formation and socio-emotional development (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Through intimate relationships, adolescents and young adults develop a deeper understanding of themselves, learn to manage their emotions effectively, communicate more clearly, and form meaningful connections with others (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). They learn to negotiate their own needs with those of their partners, manage conflict, and develop a sense of interdependence (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). Early relationships lay the foundation for the development of these skills, which are essential for psychological well-being and for building healthy, satisfying relationships in the future, characterized by respect, trust, and mutual support (Furman & Shaffer, 2003).

However, romantic relationships, especially in adolescence, can also be a source of significant distress, especially when breakups occur. Middle and late adolescence represent a key developmental window for the consolidation of intimate relationships and emotional resilience (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). Given the developmental challenges of adolescence, marked by intense physical, emotional, and social changes, young people are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of romantic loss (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Recent longitudinal evidence highlights that breakup distress is not a uniform experience; while many adolescents adapt over time, a significant subgroup follows a trajectory of high and persistent distress linked to previous relationship quality (Shulman et al., 2025). Furthermore, romantic dissolution in this stage has been increasingly recognized as a potentially traumatic event, often triggering symptoms comparable to post-traumatic stress disorder (Ziv-Beiman & Bar, 2026). In this context, it becomes essential to better understand and measure the phenomenon of Breakup Distress, defined as the emotional and psychological suffering caused by the end of a romantic relationship (Field et al. 2009).

This intense emotional fallout can sometimes lead to maladaptive coping mechanism and harmful behaviors. For example, Mullen and colleagues (1999) identified the “rejected stalker” type, a group primarily composed of individuals who cannot get over the rejection of a romantic relationship. The intense emotional distress they experience, including feelings of loss, frustration, anger, and revenge, can drive them to engage in prolonged harassment of their ex-partners. The authors point out that many of these individuals have personality disorders and often resort to various methods of harassment, ranging from repeated phone calls to surveillance. In contemporary contexts, these behaviors are frequently manifested through digital platforms. In fact, recent studies

indicate that interpersonal electronic surveillance and the active monitoring of an ex-partner on social media are robust predictors of prolonged distress and impaired adjustment (Marshall, 2025). According to Nawreen (2026), these digital dynamics often trigger a cycle of compulsive social media monitoring, which serves to intensify existing anxiety and depressive symptoms following the dissolution.

Although romantic breakups are common during adolescence, the psychological distress they may cause has received limited empirical attention, particularly about reliable and developmentally appropriate assessment tools. Most existing studies have focused on young adult or adult populations, leaving adolescent experiences comparatively underexplored. While several attempts have been made to capture the emotional impact of romantic dissolution, each presents notable limitations. For instance, Connolly and McIsaac (2009) explored adolescents’ subjective reasons for breakups - such as relational conflict, immaturity, or shifting identity needs - through a qualitative approach but did not develop a structured tool for quantifying distress. Barutcu and Aydin (2013) introduced the *Scale for Emotional Reactions Following the Breakup*, which categorizes emotional responses into two main factors: self-related emotional reactions, including feelings of sadness, relief, and guilt; and ex-partner-related reactions, characterized by anger and resentment. While this scale effectively maps the affective valence of a breakup, it remains limited to a descriptive emotional profile and lacks the inclusion of cognitive intrusions or behavioral impairments that define psychological distress in a functional sense. More recently, Mahmood, Javaid & Ali (2025) developed the *Breakup Grief Scale (BGS)*, which conceptualizes the experience through the lens of bereavement models. The BGS identifies three key dimensions: separation distress, which involves intense yearning and searching for the ex-partner; impulsive reactions, such as anger and obsessive monitoring; and emotional numbness, reflecting disbelief and avoidance. Although the BGS offers a valuable multidimensional framework for assessing the stages of mourning, its items are primarily designed to track grief processes rather than the acute intrusive symptomatology and daily functioning disruptions that are critical for rapid clinical screening in adolescent populations.

Among the existing measures, the most widely cited in the literature remains the *Breakup Distress Scale (BDS)* (Field et al., 2009, 2010). This 16-item, unidimensional self-report scale was developed based on the Complicated Grief Theory (Prigerson et al., 1995), assessing not only emotional reactions but also cognitive intrusions, difficulty accepting the loss, and pervasive disruptions in daily functioning. Although the BDS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties in samples of university students and young adults (Field et al., 2009; Shulman & Yonatan-Leus, 2024; Zapata-Vega et al., 2022), its sensitivity to the specific developmental needs of adolescents and its stability across time remain an area requiring further validation (van der Watt et al., 2025).

Despite the developmental significance of romantic breakups in adolescence, a critical gap remains in the availability of tools tailored to capture the intrusive and disabling nature of the distress that disrupts normative developmental tasks during middle and late adolescences. Moreover, literature on

how adolescents process and cope with such events is still limited and fragmented (Collins & Gillath, 2012).

To address this gap, the present study aims to validate the *Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents* (BDS-A) through two studies. In the Study 1, we adapted the adult's version of BDS for the adolescent population (Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents, BDS-A) and we tested the tenability of the main unidimensional structure through Confirmatory Factor Analysis in a sample of 164 middle and late adolescents. Starting from feedback from Study 1, a revised version of the scale was presented in the Study 2, the *Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents - Revised* (BDS-AR), and the unidimensional structure using CFA was tested in a sample of 323 middle adolescents.

Study 1

Methods

Participants and Procedure

This pilot study is part of a larger research project, entitled "*Promoting intimate relationships: romantic breakup as an adaptive transition*" (BREAKUP - Project), which focuses on the validation of the Breakup Distress Scale (BDS) in adolescence.

The initial sample consisted of 381 adolescents who were recruited through pre-existing contacts with upper secondary schools and personal networks involving individuals within the target age range. A convenience sampling approach was adopted. Of the sample, 164 individuals (43.04%) had experienced at least one romantic breakup in the previous 12 months. The gender composition of the sample appears to be balanced, with 51.8% of respondents identifying as female (N=85). The sample consisted of individuals aged 15 to 20 years ($M = 17.57$, $SD = 1.76$), encompassing both middle adolescence (15–17) and late adolescence (18–21), in accordance with standard developmental periodization (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). At the empirical level, the sample composition is justified by the recruitment method, which involved students from third, fourth, and fifth grades in secondary schools in Tuscany.

In addition to socio-demographic characteristics, descriptive data on participants' breakup experiences were also collected. Out of the 164 adolescents who completed the survey, 35 (21.3%) reported having more than one breakup in the last 12 months, while 129 (78.7%) reported having only one breakup. Among these, most participants, 27 (77.1%), reported experiencing only one breakup, while 8 (22.9%) had gone through more than one breakup. Regarding the length of the previous relationship, 17 (10%) reported being together for less than 4 weeks, 54 (33%) for 1 to 3 months, 23 (14%) for 4 to 6 months, 23 (14%) for 6 months to 1 year, and 47 (29%) for more than 1 year.

Data collection took place in April and May 2025. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The survey was administered online via Google Forms under the supervision of researchers. Only students who had experienced a romantic

breakup, as identified through a screening question, were invited to complete the full questionnaire. Only students who provided informed consent completed the study questionnaires. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by Ethics Committee for Research of the University of Florence (Protocol Number: 0107169).

Measures

Breakup-related distress was assessed using the Breakup Distress Scale (BDS; Field et al; 2009), which is a self-report measure based on Complicated Grief Theory that was originally developed for young adults (CGT; Prigerson et al., 1995). Following instructions reported in Shulman & Yonatan-Leus (2024), participants were asked first to report whether they had experienced the breakup of a romantic relationship in the preceding twelve months. If they answered that they had experienced a romantic breakup, they were asked to complete a questionnaire assessing the intensity of distress following the romantic breakup. The scale comprises 16 items that assess the emotional and cognitive responses to the most recent romantic relationship dissolution (e.g., "I feel I cannot accept the breakup I've experienced"; "I have been experiencing pain since the breakup"). Participants were asked to rate each item on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all in agreement) to 4 (totally in agreement), thereby indicating the extent to which each statement described their past experience.

The scale was translated into Italian following a standard forward-backward translation procedure (Brislin, 1970) to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence. Furthermore, a rewording adaptation was implemented to ensure the clarity and developmental appropriateness of the items for an adolescent population, as the original version was intended for young adults. This approach was meticulously designed to ensure that the language and content were comprehensible and pertinent for participants within the 15 to 20 age range. The original version (i.e., for young adults) and Italian versions of the Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents (BDS-A) are presented in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using Mplus 8.4 with Maximum Likelihood (MLR). In line with the prevailing theoretical framework and previous empirical evidence, a one-factor model was specified to represent breakup distress as a unidimensional construct. The model was assessed using the following overall indices: the chi-square (χ^2) statistic, the root-mean-squared error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR). Recommended cut-off points for the evaluation of the CFA model tested are 0.08 or 0.06 (Hu & Bentler, 1998) for RMSEA, 0.90 or 0.95 for CFI and TLI (Bollen, 1989), and 0.08 or 0.05 for SRMR (Hu & Bentler, 1998). The cut-off used for the factor loading was 0.30 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998).

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for each item of the BDS. The items showed an adequate range of responses, with means ranging from 1.63 to 2.40 and standard deviations close to 1. Skewness and kurtosis values were all within ± 1 (e.g., George & Mallery, 2010), indicating no substantial departures from normality and supporting the suitability of the data for subsequent factor analyses.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the 16-item scale confirmed the unidimensional structure. The tested model demonstrated an overall acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(104) = 189.206$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .071, SRMR = .058, TLI = .923, and CFI = .911. Although the RMSEA is slightly above the conventional .080 cutoff, the SRMR, CFI, and TLI values fall within the range typically considered indicative of an adequate fit. All items loaded significantly onto the latent factor, with standardized factor loadings ranging from .388 to .844 (see Table 2). No modification indices indicated a need for correlated errors or re-specifications.

The BDS showed excellent internal consistency in this sample ($\omega = .93$). Inter-item correlations were moderate to high, supporting its factorial suitability.

Discussion

Findings of the Study 1 showed that the unidimensional structure of the BDS well represents the data in a sample of middle and late adolescents. However, some considerations might be advanced. Firstly, using the instructions for adults, a consistent part of adolescents was excluded from the BDS administration because only about 43% of the sample had experienced at least one romantic breakup in the previous 12 months. Considering that adolescents are likely to have lower number of romantic breakups, the probability to consider only those who experienced a romantic breakup in the last 12 months is too low. To overcome this limit, all the adolescents who experienced a romantic breakup might be included, asking information about when the last occurred and referring to that one in answering to the BDS.

Another consideration is related to the difficulty adolescents had to understand which time (i.e. immediately after the breakup, in the time of the administration) they should refer to when rating the feelings/thoughts described in the BDS items. Given that with time the level of distress may often decrease across time, it is important to measure the intensity of reaction of the breakup as it was in the past immediately after the breakup, but also to understand the distress perception at the time of administration. To overcome this limit, a possibility could be to ask adolescents how they felt in the past (immediately after the breakup) and how they feel now (in the time of the administration).

Tab. 1. Descriptive Item Statistics for BDS items (N = 164)

Item	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
BDS1. I think about this person so much that it's hard to do daily things	1.963	1.015	.680	-.729
BDS2. Memories of that person upset me	2.396	.988	.022	-1.046
BDS3. I feel I cannot accept the breakup	1.835	.999	.898	-.398
BDS4. I feel drawn to places and things associated with that person	2.354	1.026	.005	-1.195
BDS5. I can't help feeling angry about the breakup	2.043	.993	.447	-.992
BDS6. I can't believe what happened	2.213	1.090	.343	-1.201
BDS7. I feel dazed about what happened	2.165	1.120	.385	-1.269
BDS8. Since we broke up, it's hard to trust people	2.233	1.158	.306	-1.389
BDS9. Since we broke up, I feel distant from people I care about	1.628	.887	1.126	.043
BDS10. Since we broke up, I feel pain	2.160	1.030	.292	-1.161
BDS11. I try to avoid reminders of that person	2.280	1.048	.192	-1.187
BDS12. Life feels empty without that person	1.744	.970	1.066	-.370
BDS13. I feel bitter about the breakup	2.270	1.095	.160	-1.343
BDS14. I feel jealous of people who haven't gone through this kind of breakup	1.779	1.006	.972	-.360
BDS15. Since we broke up, I feel lonely most of the time	1.909	1.002	.741	-.652
BDS16. I feel like crying when I think of that person	1.994	1.105	.620	-1.065

Note. SD = Standard Deviation

Tab. 2. Standardized Factor Loadings from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (N = 164)

Items	Factor loading	Items	Factor loading
BDS1	.827	BDS09	.569
BDS2	.720	BDS10	.844
BDS3	.747	BDS11	.388
BDS4	.503	BDS12	.788
BDS5	.620	BDS13	.733
BDS6	.598	BDS14	.394
BDS7	.783	BDS15	.733
BDS8	.532	BDS16	.827

Note. All loadings are standardized and statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Study 2

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Participants were involved in the BREAKUP project and took part in the initial phase, during which a survey including this scale was administered. The initial sample included 540 adolescents, of whom 323 (59.81%) reported at least one romantic breakup. Of these participants, 39.26% were female respondents ($N = 212$). The sample consisted of individuals aged 16 to 21 years ($M_{age} = 17.18$, $SD = .92$). In addition to socio-demographic characteristics, descriptive data on participants' breakup experiences were also collected. Among the 323 participants who completed the survey, 187 (57.9%) reported having experienced multiple breakups, while 136 (42.1%) reported having experienced only one. Regarding the time since the dissolution of the relationship, 16 (5.0%) participants reported that it had occurred less than 4 weeks ago, 36 (11.1%) between 1 and 3 months ago, 37 (11.5%) between 4 and 6 months ago, and 67 (20.7%) between 6 months and 1 year ago. A greater proportion of the sample reported that the breakup occurred more than one year ago (89 respondents, 27.6%) or more than two years ago (75 respondents, 23.2%).

With respect to the duration of the previous relationship, 22 (6.8%) participants reported having been together for less than 4 weeks, 96 (29.7%) for 1 to 3 months, 56 (17.3%) for 4 to 6 months, and 53 (16.4%) for 6 months to 1 year. Finally, 92 (28.5%) of participants reported that their previous relationship had lasted longer than one year.

The data collection phase was executed in May 2025. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and the procedures employed were consistent with those of Study 1. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards described in Study 1.

Measures

Breakup-related distress was assessed using the Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescent (BDS-A, see Study 1). In this study, we introduced some revisions and adjustments informed by student feedback and aimed at enhancing the clarity and applicability of the scale. Specifically, the restriction of having had a breakup within the past twelve months was removed, and an explicit temporal reference was added when asking about the perceived stress level by administering two versions of the scale: one referring to "immediately after the breakup" and the other to "at present". The scale maintained its unidimensional configuration. In contrast to Study 1, in which items were evaluated using a 4-point Likert scale, Study 2 employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not all in agreement; 5 = totally in agreement) leading to more accurate and balanced data by preventing forced choices and reducing response bias. The complete revised version, designated as the Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents - Revised (BDS-AR), is presented in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using Mplus 8.4 to examine the factorial structure of the Breakup

Distress Scale (BDS). The two versions of the scale, breakup distress immediately after the breakup and breakup distress at present, were administered within the same assessment session and modeled simultaneously within a single CFA. Each version was represented by a unidimensional latent factor defined by the same set of items. To account for shared variance due to identical item content, residuals of corresponding items across the two versions were allowed to correlate.

Consistent with the theoretical conceptualization of the construct and with the findings of Study 1, a unidimensional factor structure was specified for both versions of the BDS. All analyses were estimated using the Robust Maximum Likelihood (MLR) estimator. Model fit was evaluated using the same fit indices adopted in Study 1.

After establishing the adequacy of the baseline model, measurement invariance across the two versions of the BDS was tested following a hierarchical sequence of increasingly restrictive models (Meredith, 1993; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). First, configural invariance was examined to assess whether the same factorial structure held across versions without imposing equality constraints. Second, metric invariance was tested by constraining factor loadings to be equal across versions. Third, scalar invariance was examined by additionally constraining item intercepts. When full scalar invariance was not supported, partial scalar invariance was tested by freeing selected intercepts based on modification indices, in line with established recommendations (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Partial scalar invariance was considered sufficient to allow meaningful comparisons of latent means across the two versions of the scale. Once partial scalar invariance was established, latent mean differences between breakup distress immediately after the breakup and breakup distress at present were examined within the same model.

Model comparisons were evaluated using changes in fit indices, with particular attention to the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Following Chen (2007), a decrease in CFI greater than .01 and an increase in RMSEA greater than .015 were taken as indicators of a meaningful deterioration in model fit. The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) were also considered, with lower values indicating a better balance between model fit and parsimony (Vrieze, 2012).

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 3 reports descriptive statistics for each item of the Breakup Distress Scale for adolescents (BDS-A), assessed both "immediately after the breakup" and "at present". Immediately after the breakup, item means ranged from 2.05 to 3.33, with standard deviations around 1.3–1.6. Skewness values were generally close to zero, and kurtosis values were mostly within the acceptable range of ± 2 , suggesting no major deviations from normality. At present, items means ranged from 1.44 to 2.40, with standard deviations between 0.9 and 1.5. Skewness and kurtosis values varied more widely, with some being around or exceeding the ± 2 threshold. Overall, the descriptive results indicate an adequate distribution of responses, supporting the suitability of the data for further analyses.

Tab. 3. Descriptive Item Statistics for BDS items (N = 323)

Item	Immediately after the breakup				The present			
	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
BDS1	3.245	1.314	-.195	-1.044	1.517	.919	2.058	4.024
BDS2	3.328	1.353	-.347	-1.077	2.003	1.155	1.131	.435
BDS3	2.771	1.480	.197	-1.353	1.604	1.266	1.944	2.618
BDS4	2.920	1.537	.053	-1.472	1.895	1.186	1.183	.342
BDS5	2.715	1.480	.222	-1.342	1.604	1.266	1.875	2.767
BDS6	2.885	1.541	.106	-1.477	1.706	1.152	1.621	1.610
BDS7	3.006	1.476	-.027	-1.407	1.570	1.006	1.868	2.731
BDS8	2.907	1.543	.034	-1.478	2.402	1.453	.509	-1.176
BDS9	2.180	1.479	.840	-0.733	1.560	1.037	1.852	2.436
BDS10	3.127	1.507	-.124	-1.413	1.644	1.105	1.770	2.224
BDS 11	2.632	1.127	.372	-1.240	2.080	1.361	.968	-.355
BDS12	2.715	1.497	.221	-1.367	1.440	.940	2.420	5.325
BDS13	3.080	1.506	-.073	-1.310	1.613	1.063	1.841	2.553
BDS14	2.053	1.447	1.018	-.482	1.759	1.255	1.448	.776
BDS15	2.536	1.466	.457	-1.220	1.508	1.042	2.155	3.676
BDS16	2.969	1.617	-.011	-1.591	1.554	1.084	2.002	2.985

Note. SD = Standard Deviation

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The model showed an overall acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(447) = 936.387$, $p < .001$, $RMSEA = .058$, $SRMR = .097$, $TLI = .915$, and $CFI = .923$. Although the SRMR value was above the more conservative .06 cutoff, the remaining fit indices supported the adequacy of the unidimensional structure for both versions of the scale. All items loaded significantly onto the latent factor both “immediately after the breakup” and “at present” (see Table 4). Immediately after the breakup, standardized factor loadings ranged from .340 to .908, while at present they ranged from .281 to .877. Most items showed moderate to strong loadings, indicating that they contributed adequately to the latent construct. No modification indices suggested the need for correlated errors or model re-specifications. A small number of items (e.g., items 11 and 14) showed comparatively low

standardized loadings, with one loading falling slightly below the conventional .30 threshold in the at present version. Although these items were more weakly associated with the latent factor, all loadings were statistically significant. These items were retained because they represent conceptually important aspects of breakup distress and contribute to the content validity of the scale.

The correlation between the two latent factors was moderate and statistically significant ($r = .530$, $p < .001$), indicating related yet distinguishable representations of breakup distress assessed retrospectively and at present. The BDS showed excellent internal consistency in this sample, with $\omega = .95$ immediately after the breakup and $\omega = .93$ at present. Inter-item correlations were moderate to high, supporting the factorial suitability of the scale across both assessments.

Tab. 4. Standardized Factor Loadings from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (N=323)

Items	Immediately after the breakup	At present
	Factor loading	Factor loading
BDS1	.847	.794
BDS2	.783	.738
BDS3	.771	.648
BDS4	.764	.678
BDS5	.723	.737
BDS6	.797	.761
BDS7	.849	.803
BDS8	.489	.447
BDS9	.658	.583
BDS10	.908	.887
BDS 11	.350	.370
BDS12	.838	.789
BDS13	.857	.827
BDS14	.340	.281
BDS15	.731	.721
BDS16	.853	.788

Note. All loadings are standardized and statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Measurement Invariance

Measurement invariance of the Breakup Distress Scale (BDS) across the two versions of the scale (immediately after the breakup vs. at present) was tested using a hierarchical sequence of increasingly restrictive models (see Table 5). The configural invariance model showed an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(447) = 936.39$, $RMSEA = .058$, and $CFI = .923$, indicating that the same unidimensional factor structure held across the two versions of the scale. Metric invariance was subsequently tested by constraining factor loadings to be equal across versions. The metric invariance model also showed an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(462) = 974.91$, $RMSEA = .059$, and $CFI = .920$, with a negligible decrease in fit compared to the configural model ($\Delta CFI = -.003$; $\Delta RMSEA = .001$). In addition, changes in information criteria were minimal ($\Delta AIC = 10.83$; $\Delta BIC = -47.84$), supporting the equivalence of factor loadings across versions. The full scalar invariance model, which additionally constrained item intercepts to equality, resulted in a substantial deterioration in model fit, $\chi^2(478) = 1339.99$, $RMSEA = .075$, and $CFI = .865$, with changes exceeding recommended cutoffs ($\Delta CFI = -.055$; $\Delta RMSEA = .016$), indicating that full scalar invariance was not supported. Therefore, partial scalar invariance was tested by releasing equality constraints on selected item intercepts based on modification indices. The partial scalar invariance model (C1) showed a marked improvement in fit relative to the full scalar model, $\chi^2(477) = 1259.71$, $RMSEA = .071$, and $CFI = .877$. Improvements were observed in both CFI ($\Delta CFI = .012$) and $RMSEA$ ($\Delta RMSEA = -.004$), and this model was further supported by decreases in information criteria ($\Delta AIC = -98.75$; $\Delta BIC = -95.98$) compared to the full scalar invariance model, indicating a better balance between model fit and parsimony. Given that partial scalar invariance was established, latent mean differences between the two versions of the BDS were examined. The latent mean of breakup distress at present was estimated by fixing the latent mean of breakup distress immediately after the breakup to zero. Results indicated that breakup distress at present was significantly lower ($M = -1.534$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$), suggesting a substantial decrease in distress over time.

Discussion

The findings of the Study 2 confirm the unidimensional structure of the BDS in an independent sample of adolescents considering both versions of the scale, the one referring to the distress as perceived immediately after the breakup and to second one where the distress is perceived at the time of administration. Besides, the BDS construct seems to be well measured in all the adolescents who perceived a romantic breakup in the past, independently by the time.

General Discussion

The findings of the two studies supported the unidimensional structure of the *Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents - Revised (BDS-AR)*, consistent with the original framework proposed by Field et al. (2009), where the Breakup Distress was conceptualized as a single construct grounded in *Complicated Grief Theory* (Prigerson et al., 1995). Confirmatory Factor Analyses conducted across two independent samples further supported the validity of a single-factor model, demonstrating strong internal consistency and acceptable fit indices. These findings suggest that adolescents are able to reliably report their distress as a unitary construct encompassing emotional, cognitive, and functional dimensions. This structural stability is particularly relevant in light of emerging evidence conceptualizing romantic dissolution in adolescence not merely as a transient crisis, but as a potentially traumatic event capable of triggering symptoms comparable to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Ziv-Beiman & Bar, 2026).

Several tools have been proposed to assess emotional reactions following a romantic breakup, but many of them either focus on limited aspects of the experience or are conceptually fragmented. For instance, the Scale for Emotional Reactions Following the Breakup (Barutcu & Aydin, 2013) primarily maps specific affective states, often excludes the cognitive and behavioral disruptions central to acute distress. Similarly, the Breakup Grief Scale (BGS) (Mahmood, Javaid & Ali, 2025) captures stages of mourning, such as separation distress and impulsive reactions, but is mainly designed to monitor grief processes rather than the acute functional impairment and

Tab. 5. Tests results for measurement invariance across BDS immediately after and at present.

M	Model Type	CM	χ^2	df	RMSEA	Δ RMSEA	CFI	Δ CFI	AIC	Δ AIC	BIC	Δ BIC
A	Configural Invariance		936.39	447	.058		.923		26871.1		27297.9	
B	Metric Invariance	A	974.91	462	.059	.001	.920	-.003	26881.9	10.8	27252.1	-47.8
C	Full Scalar Invariance	B	1339.99	478	.075	.016	.865	-.055	27293.4	411.5	27603.2	351.0
C1	Partial Scalar Invariance	C	1259.71	477	.071	-.004	.877	.012	27194.6	-98.8	27508.2	-96.0
D	Latent Means Invariance	C1	1035.12	476	.060	-.011	.912	.025	26921.3	-273.3	27238.7	-269.5

Note. C1 represents the partial scalar invariance model, in which equality constraints on selected item intercepts were released based on modification indices (item 1). Based on this model, latent means were compared by fixing the latent mean immediately after the breakup to zero. Results indicated that the latent mean of distress at present was significantly lower ($M = -1.534$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$), indicating a substantial decrease in distress over time. M = BDS Model; CM = Compared Model

intrusive symptomatology targeted by stress-oriented measures such as the BDS-AR. The present studies sought to address these limitations by providing a tool specifically designed to assess the intrusive and disabling aspects of breakup distress that may interfere with normative developmental tasks (Shulman et al., 2025).

The *Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents - Revised (BDS-AR)* offers an interesting approach to measure the post-breakup distress in adolescence adding a more precise focus on the temporal reference for the measurement of the reactions' intensity, which was not considered in the adult literature. In particular, we decided to not limit the administration to those adolescents with a romantic breakup in the last 12 months, given the lower probability to have a romantic break up in adolescence. Besides, we differentiated between two breakup distress perceptions: the one as perceived immediately after the breakup, and the second one as perceived at the present. In this way, having the information about when the last breakup occurred, the instrument can give information about the individual developmental trend of the distress, although using a retrospective perspective. This is crucial for identifying different adjustment trajectories; as noted by Shulman et al. (2025), a significant subgroup of youth follows a high-distress pathway that does not resolve spontaneously. Persistent breakup distress during adolescence may interfere with identity consolidation, academic engagement, and the development of future relational competence, underscoring its relevance as a developmental risk factor rather than a transient emotional reaction (e.g., Furman & Collibee, 2014; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Furthermore, the persistence of this distress in contemporary adolescents is increasingly linked to digital interactions. The active monitoring of an ex-partner through social media platforms, often referred to as Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance (IES), has been shown to cronicize intrusive thoughts and hinder emotional detachment (Marshall, 2025). By assessing cognitive intrusions, the BDS-AR indirectly captures the impact of these digital habits on the adolescent's psychological recovery. In this sense, digital environments may fundamentally alter the recovery process by prolonging exposure to relational cues and reinforcing rumination, thereby transforming what was traditionally a time-limited stressor into a potentially chronic condition (e.g., Fox & Warber, 2014).

From a cultural perspective, the impact of a breakup is significantly compounded by prevailing societal and familial expectations. In contexts where relational choices carry substantial social weight, the dissolution of a romantic bond may impose not only individual misery but also a profound sense of shame or social disgrace. As Nawreen (2026) observes, these cultural forces can stifle open communication regarding emotional suffering, thereby escalating the risk of maladaptive adjustment and severe psychological crises within the adolescent's social ecosystem. Within this framework, validating the BDS-AR in Italy is particularly relevant, as it allows for an examination of how culturally embedded relational norms influence the breakup experience. In Italy, adolescents frequently attribute high levels of emotional dependence and perceived seriousness to their relationships, even during exploratory stages (Connolly et al., 2010). This pattern aligns

with cross-national evidence indicating that Italian youths report significantly greater emotional dependence compared to their Southern European peers, such as those in Spain (Menesini et al., 2011). Consequently, the transition through dissolution in Italy is heavily mediated by strong familial ties and the peer group. While these networks provide vital social support, they can simultaneously complicate the detachment process due to the intricate nature of shared social environments (Mancinelli et al., 2021). Such complex dynamics underscore the critical need for a culturally sensitive assessment tool to identify individuals at risk for clinical impairment within the unique Italian social framework.

The validation of the BDS-AR has significant practical implications for both clinical practice and school-based prevention. Given that romantic loss is a normative yet potentially traumatic experience, this scale serves as an efficient screening tool to identify adolescents who may follow high and persistent distress trajectories (Shulman et al., 2025). Specifically, the BDS-AR can be integrated into school counseling protocols to pinpoint students who lack the resilience to navigate relational transitions and might be vulnerable to severe psychological despair or suicidal ideation. As highlighted by Farha et al. (2025), school-based psychoeducational interventions can significantly mitigate the emotional fallout of a breakup; thus, the BDS-AR provides a robust empirical foundation for tailoring such preventive programs. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of fostering "romantic competence" (e.g., encompassing insight, mutuality, and emotion regulation) to equip youth with the necessary psychological tools for healthy relational functioning (Bibby & Davila, 2026). This perspective aligns with the promotion of "relational literacy," which entails instructing youth in healthy communication, empathy, and conflict resolution (Nawreen, 2026).

While the studies present some relevant strengths, such as the multi-stage process of scale validation, and the test of the structure in two independent samples. At the same time, some limitations are also present. Firstly, the sample was geographically localized to a specific region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader Italian adolescent population. Secondly, the study did not address gender or age invariance, and thirdly the study did not evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the BDS-AR, which would have provided further evidence of its construct validity. Future studies will address these open issues.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the present research provides the first validation of the Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents - Revised (BDS-AR) in the Italian context. By confirming its unidimensional structure and psychometric reliability across two independent samples, this study offers a sound instrument specifically tailored to the developmental needs of adolescents. Unlike existing scales that focus primarily on mourning stages or general emotions, the BDS-AR effectively captures the intrusive and disabling nature of acute distress, including its evolution over time. As romantic relationships continue to play

a pivotal role in adolescent identity and well-being, the BDS-AR emerges as a vital resource for researchers and clinicians dedicated to supporting youth through the complexities of romantic dissolution.

Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki. The research protocol was reviewed and formally approved by the Institutional Review Board (Ethics Committee for Research) of the University of Florence (Protocol Number: 0107169).

Data Availability Statement

The raw datasets generated and analyzed during the current research, along with the Mplus syntax files used for Confirmatory Factor Analysis and measurement invariance modeling, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable academic request.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work, results, or interpretations reported in this paper.

Author Contributions

MS: Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, statistical data analysis, and manuscript drafting. LDL: Statistical modeling advice, methodology review, and critical revision of the manuscript. AN: Project supervision, resources, and final editing and approval of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Supplementary material

Not applicable.

Declaration about the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used generative AI and AI-assisted technologies solely to complement human editing and improve the linguistic clarity and academic phrasing of the text. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the contexts and final integrity of the publication.

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APPENDIX A

Breakup Distress Scale

Original English version of the Breakup Distress Scale (BDS)

During the last 12 months, have you experienced a romantic breakup?

- No
- Yes, once
- Yes, more than once

If yes, please answer the following questions referring to your last breakup.

Think about that person and for each question, read the statement carefully and indicate how much you agree, choosing a number from 1 to 4, where:

- 1 = Not at all in agreement
- 2 = Not in agreement
- 3 = In agreement
- 4 = Totally in agreement

1. I think about this person so much that it's hard for me to do things I normally do
2. Memories of that person upset me
3. I feel I cannot accept the breakup I've experienced
4. I feel drawn to places and things associated with the person
5. I can't help feeling angry about the breakup
6. I feel disbelief over what happened
7. I feel stunned or dazed over what happened
8. Ever since the breakup it is hard for me to trust people
9. Ever the breakup I feel like I have lost the ability to care about other people or I feel distant from people I care about
10. I have been experiencing pain since the breakup
11. I go out of my way to avoid reminders of the person
12. I feel that life is empty without the person
13. I feel bitter over this breakup
14. I feel envious of people who have not experienced a breakup like this
15. I feel lonely a great deal of the time since the breakup
16. I feel like crying when I think of the person

Italian version of the Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents (BDS-A)

Durante gli ultimi 12 mesi hai avuto esperienza di una rottura sentimentale?

- No
- Sì, una volta
- Sì, più di una volta

Se sì, rispondi alle seguenti domande facendo riferimento alla tua ultima rottura sentimentale.

Pensa a quella persona e per ogni domanda leggi attentamente l'affermazione e indica quanto sei d'accordo, scegliendo un numero da 1 a 4, dove:

- 1 = Per nulla d'accordo
- 2 = Poco d'accordo
- 3 = Abbastanza d'accordo
- 4 = Molto d'accordo

1. Penso a questa persona così tanto che è difficile per me fare le cose di tutti i giorni
2. I ricordi di quella persona mi sconvolgono
3. Sento di non poter accettare la rottura che ho vissuto
4. Mi sento attratto/a dai luoghi e dalle cose associate a quella
5. Non riesco a evitare di sentirmi arrabbiato/a per la rottura
6. Non riesco a credere a quello che è accaduto
7. Mi sento stordito/a per quello che è successo
8. Da quando ci siamo lasciati è difficile per me fidarmi delle persone
9. Da quando ci siamo lasciati mi sento distante dalle persone a cui tengo
10. Da quando ci siamo lasciati provo dolore
11. Faccio di tutto per evitare i ricordi di quella persona
12. Sento la vita vuota senza quella persona
13. Mi sento amareggiato/a per la rottura
14. Sono invidioso/a di chi non ha avuto esperienze di rotture come questa
15. Da quando ci siamo lasciati mi sento solo/a gran parte del tempo
16. Mi viene da piangere quando penso a quella persona

APPENDIX B

Breakup Distress Scale for Adolescents Revised (BDS-AR)

English Version

Have you ever experienced a romantic breakup?

- No
- Yes, once
- Yes, more than once

Think about your LAST BREAKUP EXPERIENCE and for each statement indicate how much you agree, considering: 'IMMEDIATELY AFTER the breakup' and 'AT PRESENT', from 1 to 5 as follows:

1 = Not all in agreement 2 = Slightly in agreement 3 = Moderately in agreement 4 = Very much in agreement 5 = Totally in agreement

1. I think about this person so much that it is hard for me to do everyday things
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
2. Memories of that person upset me
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
3. I feel I cannot accept the breakup I experienced
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
4. I feel drawn to places and things associated with that person
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
5. I cannot help feeling angry about the breakup
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5

6. I cannot believe what happened
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 7. I feel stunned about what happened
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 8. Since we broke up, it has been difficult for me to trust people
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 9. Since we broke up, I feel distant from the people I care about
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 10. Since we broke up, I feel pain
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 11. I do everything I can to avoid memories of that person
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 12. I feel life is empty without that person
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 13. I feel bitter about the breakup
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 14. I feel jealous of people who haven't gone through this kind of breakup
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 15. Since we broke up, I feel lonely most of the time
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
 16. I feel like crying when I think about that person
Immediately after: 1 2 3 4 5
At present: 1 2 3 4 5
- Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
4. Mi sento attratto/a dai luoghi e dalle cose associate a quella persona
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 5. Non riesco a evitare di sentirmi arrabbiato/a per la rottura
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 6. Non riesco a credere a quello che è accaduto
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 7. Mi sento stordito/a per quello che è successo
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 8. Da quando ci siamo lasciati è difficile per me fidarmi delle persone
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 9. Da quando ci siamo lasciati mi sento distante dalle persone a cui tengo
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 10. Da quando ci siamo lasciati provo dolore
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 11. Faccio di tutto per evitare i ricordi di quella persona
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 12. Sento la vita vuota senza quella persona
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 13. Mi sento amareggiato/a per la rottura
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 14. Sono invidioso/a di chi non ha avuto esperienze di rotture come questa
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 15. Da quando ci siamo lasciati mi sento solo/a gran parte del tempo
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
 16. Mi viene da piangere quando penso a quella persona
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5

Italian Version

Hai mai avuto esperienza di una rottura sentimentale?

- No
- Sì, una volta
- Sì, più di una volta

Pensa alla tua ULTIMA ESPERIENZA DI ROTTURA e per ogni affermazione indica quanto sei d'accordo pensando a: 'SUBITO DOPO la rottura' e 'OGGI', da 1 a 5 come segue:
1 = Per nulla d'accordo 2 = Poco d'accordo 3 = Abbastanza d'accordo 4 = Molto d'accordo 5 = Totalmente d'accordo

1. Penso a questa persona così tanto che è difficile per me fare le cose di tutti i giorni
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
2. I ricordi di quella persona mi sconvolgono
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5
Oggi: 1 2 3 4 5
3. Sento di non poter accettare la rottura che ho vissuto
Subito dopo: 1 2 3 4 5