



Journal of Medical Sciences

ISSN 1682-4474

science
alert

ANSI*net*
an open access publisher
<http://ansinet.com>

JMS (ISSN 1682-4474) is an international, peer-reviewed scientific journal that publishes original article in experimental & clinical medicine and related disciplines such as molecular biology, biochemistry, genetics, biophysics, bio-and medical technology. JMS is issued eight times per year on paper and in electronic format.

For further information about this article or if you need reprints, please contact:

N.M. Bakhshani
Department of Psychiatry
and Clinical Psychology,
Zahedan University of
Medical Sciences,
Zahedan, Iran

J. Med. Sci., 7 (1): 106-110
1st January, 2007

Role of Personality Styles (Sociotropy/Autonomy) and Moderating Effects of Social Support in Clinically Depressed Patients

N.M. Bakhshani

This study was done to investigate the moderating effects of social support on severity of depressive symptoms of clinically depressed patients with different personality configurations (sociotropy/autonomy). The participants were 92 unipolar MDD patients (58 female and 34 male) that completed BDI, PSI, LES and ISSB questionnaires. Based on results of regression analysis, social support can moderate severity of depressive symptoms, but its contribution can be influenced by dominant personality configurations. In highly sociotropic depressed patients, the effect of social support on depressive symptoms (BDI score) is significant, but in highly autonomous patients is not significant. In general, highly sociotropic or dependent people value close relationships thus may show more severe depressive symptoms after negative interpersonal events such as loss of perceived social support.

Key words: Sociotropy, autonomy, social support, depression

INTRODUCTION

A range of risk factors have been identified in relation to psychopathology of depression; such as personality characteristics (Boyce *et al.*, 2001), life stresses and inadequate social support (Beck, 1996). Several theoreticians have proposed that relatedness and self-definition are two principal cognitive-personality configurations associated with the onset and maintenance of depression. These fundamental concepts initially were articulated by Freud (1914, 1926).

Freud (1914) discussed the relationship between depression (melancholia) and oral-incorporative stage of libidinal development and also to a more advanced complex phase of psychological development that derives from the formation of the superego and the beginning dissolution of the oedipal complex. Bowlby (1980, 1988) from object relations perspective, Arieti and Bemporad (1978, 1980) from an interpersonal position Blatt (1974, 1990, 1998) and Blatt and Zuroff (1992) from object relational, ego psychoanalytic and as a cognitive development perspectives distinguished two personality types. Characteristics of anxiously attached and compulsively self-reliant individuals (Bowlby's Theory), dominant other and goal oriented personalities (Arieti and Bemporad's position) and Blatt's dependent and self-critical types are very similar to Beck's description (Beck, 1983) of sociotropy and autonomy.

Sociotropic and autonomous individuals may experience life events differently (Frewen and Dozois, 2006). Sociotropic individuals seek to establish secure interpersonal relations to booster low-self esteem and also excessively invest in positive exchanges with other people for acceptance, support and guidance. In contrast, autonomous individuals are very concerned about the possibility of personal failure and often try to maximize their control over the environment to reduce the probability of failure and criticism. Thus, as a result of personality, certain people will be sensitive to the loss or threat of loss posed by specific kinds of stressful experiences. Sociotropic individuals are susceptible to social losses and autonomous persons are susceptible to negative life events that influence their goal oriented activities. For example Beck *et al.* (2003) found that sociotropic students after leaving home and transition to college display the classic symptoms of homesickness and depressive disorder. By contrast it was observed that autonomy was related to disliking university scores which did mediate indirect effect of autonomy and depression.

Abela *et al.* (2006) found that high self criticism (autonomy) associated with greater elevations in depressive symptoms following elevations in hassles in

low but not high self esteem individuals. But high dependency (sociotropy) associated with elevations in depressive symptoms following elevations in hassles in high self esteem individuals. In general, personality traits may mediate social support and its effect on distress and health complaints. Hence, it may be important to include personality variables when investigating social support in relation to distress and health (Pedersen *et al.*, 2002).

Although from cognitive orientation (Beck, 1983, 1996) believes that sociotropy and autonomy have influential effect on information processing; and also intrapersonal theorists (Kiesler, 1983; Luborsky, 1984; Strupp and Binder, 1984) discussed that emotional concerns of individuals influence the way they construe and respond to social interactions; In other words as Liang *et al.* (2001) suggest that giving and receiving support have both positive and negative consequences on well-being and certain personalities (Shirey, 2004) my find social support useful while other may not; but hitherto the role of personality styles on moderating effect of social support have received less attention. Thus, this study is a preliminary attempt to explore the moderating effect of social support as an important social resource in Iranian clinically depressed individuals with different personality configuration (Sociotropy/autonomy).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: The study was conducted in Baharan Psychiatric Center of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences. Participants were 92 outpatients with a DSM-IV diagnosis of unipolar major depression. All of them were recruited through the Clinical Psychology and Psychiatric Department of Zahedan psychiatric Center (Baharan Hospital). Persons with history of bipolar disorder, Axis I disorder, substance dependency and substance abuse disorder were excluded. Demographic information of participants noted in Table 1.

Instruments: Subjects individually were asked to complete BDI, PSI, LES and ISSB inventories. BDI (Beck Depression Inventory) is considered one of the most widely used self report measure of depression. A recent review and data analysis of psychometric studies of the

Table 1: Demographic information of subjects

		F	P
Sex	Female	58	63
	Male	34	37
Marital status	Single	40	43/5
	Married	51	55/4
	Divorced	1	1/1
Education	University	21	23
	High school	44	47
	>High school	27	29/3

BDI reported a mean coefficient of 0.86, high concurrent validities with other self reports and clinician rating and discriminate validity with subtypes of depression and anxiety symptoms (Beck *et al.*, 1988).

PSI (personal style Inventory) is a likert scale with 48 items designed to measure the constructs of sociotropy and autonomy (Robins *et al.*, 1994). Both scales (Sociotrope/autonomy) have been reported to have excellent interval consistency and good construct validity in both students and depressed patients (Ouimette *et al.*, 1994; Robins *et al.*, 1994). The life experiences survey (LES; Sarason *et al.*, 1978) is a 57 item self report inventory divided into two sections: The section one consists of 47 items that refer to life changes in a wide variety of situations and section two consists of 10 items that are designed primarily for use with students. The Inventory of Social Supportive Behaviors (ISSB, Barrera, 1981) is a 40- item self report measure that was designed to assess how often individuals received various forms of assistance (Barrera, 1981; Picko, 1998). In the present study, subjects were asked to rate the frequency of each item on 5-point likert scales (0-4). The internal consistency reliability has been consistently above 0.9 and over a 2-day interval, test-retest reliability was 0.88 (Barrera, 1981; Barrera *et al.*, 1981).

RESULTS

The means and standard deviations of the study measures are presented in Table 2. Based on PSI scores, 21.5% (n = 39) of participants are highly sociotrope, 17.4% (n = 16) highly autonom, 31.5% highly mixed and 19.6% low mixed (Table 3).

The main purpose of the study focused on life negative events and social support in sociotropic and autonomous clinical depressed individuals. We hypothesized that each of these two variables would contribute unique variance to the prediction of depressed scores (BDI). We conducted a multiple regression

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of study measures

Variable	Mean	SD
Sociotropy (PSI)	114.18	15.20
Autonomy (PSI)	99.00	17.30
Life negative- Experience (LES)	17.63	8.41
Social support (ISSB)	55.80	24.54

Table 3: Frequency of subjects based on personality style

Personal style	F	P
Highly sociotrope	29	31.5
Highly autonom	16	17.4
Highly Mixed	29	31.5
Moderate/ low mixed	18	19.6

Table 4: Multiple regression of depressive scores (BDI) on negative events and social support in participants

Variable entered	β	t	p	Partial correlation
Negative Life events	0.41	4.16	0.00	0.46
Social support	-0.38	-4.27	0.00	-0.42
Multiple				
R = 0.68				
R ² = 0.36			F(2,89) = 24.83, p = 0.000	
Adjusted R ² = 0.35				

Table 5: Multiple regression of depressive scores (BDI) on negative events and social support in highly sociotrope participants

Variable entered	β	t	p	Partial correlation
Negative life events	0.5	3.38	0.02	0.63
Social support	-0.36	-2.4	0.02	-0.54
Multiple				
R = 0.52				
R ² = 0.27			F(2,26) = 4.71, p = 0.01	
Adjusted R ² = 0.21				

Table 6: Multiple regression of depressive scores (BDI) on negative life events and social support in highly autonom participants

Variables entered	β	t	p	Partial correlations
Negative life Events	0.52	2.69	0.01	0.57
Social support	-0.37	-1.9	0.08	-0.44
Multiple				
R ² = 0.68				
R ² = 0.45			F(2,15) = 6.33, p = 0.01	
Adjusted R ² = 0.38				

analysis with BDI scores as the criterion and two markers as the predictors (Table 4). The result of regression analysis was highly significant in all depressed participants.

As presented in Table 4. All variables were identified as significant predictors, indicating that each factor contributed uniquely to depression.

Together these variables accounted for 0.35 of the variance in BDI scores. Partial correlations indicated that negative life events accounted for 21.16% of unique variance in BDI Scores and social support accounted for 16.64%.

In highly sociotrope participants (Table 5) the regression analysis was significant (F (2, 26) = 4.71, p<0.01) and also negative life events and social support were identified as significant predictors; in contrast with, in highly autonom participants the regression analysis was significant (F (2, 15) = 6.33, p<0.01) but unique contribution of social support was not Significant (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

The current findings relatively consistent with literature about the role of personality styles and with protective effects of social support based on personality characteristics of people. The findings specifically support work by Cheung *et al.* (1997) which showed that the social support contributes to the prediction of

psychological well being of sociotropic individuals, but contribution of social support in autonomous individuals was not significant. The findings of present study provide support for theoretical viewpoints of Beck (1983), Bowlby (1980), Arieti and Bemporad (1980) and Blatt and Zurroff (1992) who discussed different tendencies of two principal personality configurations (Sociotropy/dependency, autonomy/self criticism). According to Bowlby, anxiety attached persons seek interpersonal contact and are excessively dependent on others. Blatt and Zurroff (1992) and Beck (1983) discussed that sociotropic (dependent) individuals invest in positive interchange with other people. In other word, highly sociotropic individuals are particularly concerned about the possibility of being disapproved by others and the try maintain their attachments. In other hand compulsive self reliant persons (autonomy/self criticism) are excessively autonomous and they avoid intimate close interpersonal relationships. In general, highly sociotropic (Beck, 1983) or dependent (Blatt, 1974) people value close relationships, which may leave them vulnerable to depression after negative interpersonal events.

As interpersonal writers (Kiesler, 1983; Luborsky, 1984) discussed that emotional concerns of individuals influence the way they construe and respond to interactions thus sociotropic individuals have more interest to receiving support from others and loss of social support is more harmful for them, in comparison to autonomous persons who more concern about self definition and independency. Beck (1983) believed that sociotropy and autonomy have important role in information processing that influence modal processing. Thus it is possible that persons with different personality dimensions perceive supportive resources differently and they experience different degree of psychological distress when posit negative life events. In summary, although this study could not experimentally examine the role of personality factors on moderating effects of social support but findings show that social support has more moderating effect for sociotropic persons than autonomous ones. Then attention to this issue in treatment plans and preventive programs is useful. However, one should keep in mind that although the results showed moderating effect of social support especially for socitropic persons and relatively consistent with interpersonal writers (Kiesler, 1983; Luborsky, 1984) and also with descriptions of Beck (1983) and Blatt and Zuroff (1992) concerning interpersonal differences in depressed individuals but small sample in subgroups (highly sociotrope and highly autonom) is a strong limitation. Also, contributions of different forms of social support were not studied.

REFERENCES

- Abela, J.R.Z., C.A. Webb, C. Wanger *et al.*, 2006. The role of self criticism, dependency and hassles in the course of depressive illness. A multiwave longitudinal study. *Personality Social Psychol. Bull.*, 32: 328-338.
- Arieti, S. and J.R. Bemporad, 1978. *Severe and Mild Depression: The Therapeutic Approach*. NewYork: Basic Books.
- Arieti, S. and J.R. Bemporad, 1980. The psychological organization of depression. *Am. J. Psychol.*, 137: 1360-1365.
- Barrera, M.Jr., 1981. Social Support in the Adjustment of Pregnant Adolescents: Assessment Issues. in Gottlieb B.H. (Ed.), *Social networks and social support*. Beverly Hills: Sage, pp: 69-96.
- Barrera, M., Jr. I.N. Sandler and T.B. Ramsay, 1981. Preliminary development of a scale of social support: Studies on college students. *Am. J. Commun. Psychol.*, 9: 435-447.
- Beck, A.T., 1983. Cognitive Therapy of Depression: New perspectives. In *Treatment of Depression: Old Controversies and New Approaches*. Clayton, P.J. and J.E. Barrett (Eds.). New York: Raven, pp: 265-290.
- Beck, A.T., R.A. Steer and M.G. Garbin, 1988. Psychometric Properties of the Beck Depression Inventory: Twenty-five years of evaluation. *Clin. Psychol. Rev.*, 8: 77-100.
- Beck, A.T., 1996. *Beyond Belief: A Theory of Modes, Personality and Psychopathology*. In: *Frontiers of Cognitive Therapy*. Salkovskis, P.M. (Ed). London: The Guilford Press.
- Beck, R., C. Taylor and M. Robbins, 2003. Missing home: Sociotropy and autonomy and their relationship to psychological distress and homesickness in college freshmen. *Anxiety, Stress and Coping*, 16: 155-166.
- Blatt, S.J., 1974. Levels of object representation in anaclitic and introjective depression. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 29: 107-157.
- Blatt, S.J., 1990. Interpersonal Relatedness and Self-Definition: Two personality configurations and their implications for psychopathology and psychotherapy. In *Repression and Dissociation: Implications for Personality Theory, Psychopathology and Health*, Ed. Singer, J.L. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp: 299-335.
- Blatt, S.J. and D.C. Zuroff, 1992. Interpersonal relatedness and self- definition: Two prototypes for depression. *Clin. Psychol. Rev.*, 121: 527-562.

- Blatt, S.J., 1998. Contributions of psychoanalysis to the understanding and treatment of depression. *J. Am. Psychoanal. Assoc.*, 46: 722-752.
- Bowlby, J., 1980. Attachment and loss: Loss, sadness and depression. New York: Basic Books. Vol. 1 3.
- Bowlby, J., 1988. A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development. Basic Books.
- Boyce, P., A. Hickey, J. Gilchrist and N.J. Talley, 2001. The development of a brief personality scale to measure vulnerability to postnatal depression. *Arch. Women Ment. Health*, 3: 147-153.
- Cheung, S.K., S.Y.K. Sun, Y.S. Mak and W.W. Fung, 1997. Sociotropy, Autonomy and differential effects of social support on psychological well-being. *Psychol. Abst.*, 40: 112-120.
- Freud, S., 1914. On Narcissism: An introduction. *Standard Edition*, 14: 73-102.
- Freud, S., 1926. Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety. *Standard Edition*, 20: 87-174.
- Frewen, P.A and D.J.A. Dozois, 2006. Self worth appraisal of life events and Beck's congruency model of depression vulnerability. *J. Cogn. Psychother.*, 20: 231-240.
- Kiesler, D.J., 1983. The 1982 interpersonal circle: A taxonomy for complementarity in human transactions. *Psychoo. Rev.*, 90: 185-214.
- Liang, J., N.M. Krause and J. Bennet, 2001. Social exchange and well-being. Is giving better than receiving? *Psychol. Aging*, 16: 511-523.
- Luborsky, L., 1984. Principles of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy. A manual for Supportive-Expressive Treatment. Basic Books, New York.
- Ouimette, P.C., Klien and D.N. Anderson *et al.*, 1994. Relationship of sociotropy/autonomy and dependency/self-criticism to DSM-III-R personality disorder. *J. Abnormal Psychol.*, 103: 743-749.
- Pedersen, S.S., B. Middle and M.L. Larsen, 2002. The role of personality variables and social support in distress and perceived health in patients following myocardial infection. *J. Psychosomatic Res.*, 52: 1171-1175.
- Picko, B., 1998. Social support and health in adolescence: A factor analytical study. *Br. J. Health Psychol.*, 3: 333-344.
- Robins, C.J., J.S. Ladd and J. Welkowitz *et al.*, 1994. The Personal Style Inventory: Preliminary validation studies of new measures of sociotropy and autonomy. *J. Psychopathol. Behav. Assess.* 16: 277-300.
- Sarason, I.G., J.H. Johnson and J.M. Siegel, 1978. Assessing the impact of life changes: Development of the life experiences survey. *J. Consul. Clin. Psychol.*, 46: 932-946.
- Shirey, M.R., 2004. Social support in the work place. Nurse leader implications. *Nurse Econ.*, 22: 313-319.
- Strupp, H.H. and J. Binder, 1984. Psychotherapy in a New key. A Guide to Time Limited Dynamic Psychotherapy. Basic Books, New York.