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Depression as Predictor of Self-Injurious Behavior among Individual Living in Shelter Homes: Moderating Role of Attribution Style

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Abstract

Depression is a serious condition that impact the way individual react to the situation. One of the leading consequences of depression is non-suicidal self-injurious behavior. The literature has documented the impact of negative attribution on depression as well as non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors. The current study aimed to examine how depression influence the occurrence of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors and how negative attribution style moderated the relationship between depression and non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors among residents of shelter homes. A sample of 300 residents of shelter homes was approached individually and three questionnaires were used for the data collection, attributional style questionnaire, Zung self- rating depression scale and Ottawa self- injury inventory along with demographic sheet. The result analysis revealed a positive correlation among self-injurious behavior, depression, and negative attributional style. The results revealed that depression is significant predictor of self-injurious behavior. Negative attributional style significantly moderated the relationship between depression and self-injurious behavior.

Keywords: Depression, Predictor, Self-Injurious, Behavior, Individual Living, Shelter Homes

Introduction

Robenson (2017) noted that individuals living in shelter homes are considered homeless. He stressed the need to understand the impact of

shelter homes on emotional and mental health of individuals. It is documented that many mental health problems including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation are common among homeless individuals. Alowaimier (2018) reported that there are many physical and psychological problems associated with living in shelter homes. Individuals living in shelter homes face greater risk of suffering from mental health problems. It is reported that there is higher prevalence of depression, anxiety and non-suicidal self-injurious behavior among homeless individuals (Lo et al., 2021).

Attributional Style

Pan et al. (2018) defined attributional style as causal analysis of behaviors and events. They classified attribution style into inner vs outer attribution, controllable vs uncontrollable attributions, stable vs variable attribution and global vs specific attributions. Robinson (2017) stated that attribution styles refers to explaining the causes of events. Attribution style is a cognitive construct and enables oneself to attribute causality to negative or positive events. He differentiated between two distinct types of attribution style. Optimistic attribution style or positive attribution style characterized by the unstable, specific and external causality compared to pessimistic or negative attribution style characterized by stable, global and internal causality.

The attribution theory divides attribution to three broad dimensions: dimension one focus on locus of control, further divided into internal and external locus of control; stability comprising of non-changeable and changeable subdimensions; controllability and uncontrollability subdimensions (Zimmermann & Papa, 2020).

Depression

Depression is a state in which person experiences loss of interest and happiness, depressed mood accompanied by feelings of guilt, loneliness, sadness, emptiness, irritability, and ineffectiveness (Jonker et al., 2019). Lim et al. (2018) reported that depression is most prevalent mental illness. According to them depression is marked by gloominess, loss of interest and happiness, emptiness, feelings of tiredness and poor concentration. The depressive episode is often followed by self-harming behaviors.

Bathina et al. (2021) reported that depression is regarded as a universal disorder. It is estimated that depression effect more than two hundred and sixty-four million people across the globe. Depression is not like common mood disturbances neither it comprises of temporary emotional reactions to challenges in routine. Depression is said to cause serious mental health problems in functioning across domains such as work, school or family.

Bathina and colleagues argued that depression is the foremost cause of suicide, suicidal attempts or non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors.

Non-Suicidal Self-Injurious Behavior

Non-suicidal self-injury is characterized by voluntarily damaging body parts. The voluntary action is not intended to die by damaging body parts. Non-suicidal self-injurious behavior is the hallmark sign of borderline personality disorder. The prevalence for non-suicidal self-injury is 2.7% in the general population whereas 4 to 7% of individual are involved in repetitive self-harm (Rehman et al., 2021).

Self-injurious behavior also known as self-mutilation and self-harm is characterized by deliberate harm to body through cutting. Non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors may involve acts of incapacitating, hair pulling, rubbing or inflicting pain to the body (Hendrick, 2016). It can also be characterized by having heavy dose, piercing of body organs, biting and self-battery. It is argued that self-harm is a significant public health concern globally (Taylor et al., 2021). Hack and Martin (2018) reported that self-injurious behaviors starts in early adolescence and gradually increase in intensity with age progression.

Depression, Attributional Style and Self- Injurious Behavior

Thought process disturbances are linked with depression, whereas Beck attributed depression as dysfunctional cognitive schemas, that are generated by irrational and non-authentic beliefs. The schemas comprised of negative thought patterns about self, negative perceptions of others and future concerns, believed to be the causal contributors of depression. Depressed individuals tend to evaluate their incidences negatively while exhibiting unpleasant attributions about self and the world. It is well documented that adverse attribution has a dominant connection with depression (Sami & Naveeda, 2021). Studies have been conducted to examine how thinking style play an important role in suicidal ideation. The underlying mechanism attributed for suicide attempts or non-suicidal harm among depressed individuals is pessimistic thinking style (Frumkin et al., 2021).

Cognitive styles play a key role in development of grief and depression. The scarcity of positive attributions leads to depression accompanied by negative attribution, that may increase the risk of depression manyfold. Researchers have identified negative attributions as stable, global and internal (Kpolou et al., 2018). The documented evidences suggested that stable, global and internal attributions that are part of negative attributions, may serve as a base for depression. Contrary to negative attribution if the individuals having positive attribution related to unstable, specific and external attribution. Such positive attribution may decrease the depression

as the causality is attributed as unstable, specific and external events (Hamilton et al., 2016).

Maladaptive thinking pattern has been associated with higher possibility for initiating self-harming behavior. Studies have focused on how maladaptive thinking patterns or negative attribution styles have been associated with depression as well as non-suicidal self-injuries. According to Tsypes and Gibb (2016) negative attribution style as leading cause of depression is explained by hopelessness theory (Abramson et al., 1998) and response styles theory (Nolen Hoeksema, 2012). They further added that negative attribution style also leads to self-harming behavior.

Current research aimed at studying the moderating role played by attribution style and the impact of depressive symptoms on non-suicidal self-injurious behavior. No previous study has examined the study variables among individuals living in shelter homes.

Method

Objectives

The present study was designed to investigate the following objectives.

1. To examine the interrelationship among depression, non-suicidal self-injurious behavior and negative attribution style.
2. To assess the predictive role of depression in explaining non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.
3. To examine the moderating role of negative attribution style in relationship between depression and non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested to verify the objectives of study

1. There is significant negative positive relationship among negative attribution style, depression and non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.
2. Depression will significantly predict non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.
3. Negative attributional style will moderate the relationship between depression and self-injurious behavior.

Definitions of Variables

Negative Attribution Style

According to Escrig and Garijo (2020) negative attributional style is characterized by negative thinking patterns consist of global, stable, internal attributions. In current study the scores obtained on Attribution Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Peterson et al., 1996) is used to operationalized the negative attribution style.

Depression

According to Higuera (2020) depression, a mood disorder, is characterized by a loss of interest in daily life activities accompanied by feelings of worthlessness. Depression is also characterized by sadness, irritability, loss and anger, feeling of emptiness effecting individual. In current study the score obtained on Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale (ZSRDS; Zung, 1965) is used to operationalize the depression.

Non-Suicidal Self-Injurious Behavior

Samari et al. (2020) defined non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors as acts of harming oneself with intension to die. The acts such as burning, cutting, self-poisoning, scratching, hair pulling, hitting, over dose of drugs and biting. In current research the score obtained on Urdu version of Ottawa Self-Injury Inventory (OSII; Lewis et al., 2019) is used to operationalize the non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.

Research Design

The current research is based on quantitative research design using cross-sectional survey design to study the interrelationship among variables.

Sample

The population for current study comprised of residents of shelter homes who were living in shelter homes for more than 6 months. A sample of 300 participants was conveniently selected from shelter homes of Hazara Division.

Research Instruments

Three research instruments were used to tap non-suicidal self-injurious behavior, depression and negative attribution style. Following three scales were used to gather the data.

Attribution Style Questionnaire (ASQ)

The attribution style questionnaire was developed by Peterson et al. (1996). The scale consisted of 12 items with a response category of 7-point Likert scale. The scale is further divided into two subscales stability and globality. Urdu version of the attribution style was used and alpha reliability for attribution style questionnaire and its subscales is .90, .81 and .74 respectively.

Ottawa Self-injury Inventory

Lewis et al. (2019) developed Ottawa Self-injury Inventory that comprised of 31 items. Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-injurious behaviors. Alpha reliability shown by the scale is .89 for the current study.

Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale

Urdu translation of Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale (ZSRDS; Zung, 1965) is a 4-point Likert scale. The scale has 20-items with scoring ranging from one for little of the time to four for most of the time. In current research the alpha coefficient for Zung self-rating depression scale is .81.

Procedure of the study

The data were gathered from the residents of shelter homes after obtaining permission from relevant persons and authorities. Each resident was briefed about the nature of the research and pros and cons associated with it. They were assured of the privacy and confidentiality of the data. Each resident was approach individually and their informed consent was obtained. The filled questionnaires were taken back and the residents were thanked for their valuable contribution.

Results

The results were computed after data were collected from the residents of shelter homes. Both inferential and descriptive statistics were computed and hypotheses were tested.

Table 1

Intercorrelation among Negative Attribution Style, Depression and Non-Suicidal Self-Injurious behavior (self-harm) among Residents of Shelter Homes (N= 300)

	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
1. Depression	-	.22***	.27***	.15**	.14*	48.29	6.13
2. NegAttribution		-	.97***	.91***	.52***	14.66	33.06
3. Stability			-	.87***	.63***	5.54	17.82
4. Globality				-	.55***	9.06	16.03
5. Self-Harm					-	51.87	16.16

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The results in above table indicated that depression is significantly positively related to negative attribution style, stability, globality, and non-suicidal self-injurious behavior among residents of shelter homes.

Table 2

Simple Linear Regression Analysis on Depression as Predictor of Self-Injurious Behavior (N=300)

Variables	R	R ²	B	β	F	SE
Depression	.179	.032	.417	.179	9.859***	1.50

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2 indicated that depression caused 3.2% variation in non-suicidal self-injurious behavior. Depression is significant positive contributor to non-suicidal self-injurious behavior ($B = .471, p < .001$). The results implied that increased level of depression is associated with increased non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.

Table 3

Stepwise Hierarchical Regression for Depression and Negative Attribution Style and Non-Suicidal Self-Injurious Behavior

Variables	B	95% CL		SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		LL	UL				
Step 1						.032**	.032**
Constant	29.12***	14.75	43.49	7.30			
Depression	.471**	.176	.766	.150	.179***		
Step 2						.269***	.237***
(Constant)	39.42***	26.73	52.11	6.45			
Depression	.184	-.079	.448	.135	.070		
Negative-Attribution	.243***	.195	.292	.025	.499***		
Step 3						.831***	.544***
(Constant)	26.43***	19.44	32.92	3.29			
Depression	.382***	.248	.516	.068	.145		
Negative-Attribution	-.737***	-.807	-.667	.036	-1.51		
Dep×NA	.017***	-.009	.016	.018	2.12		

Note. CI = confidence Interval; LL = lower limit; UL= upper limit. The results in above table represents Hierarchal multiple regression indicating moderating role of attribution style in relationship between depression and non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.

In step 1, depression explained 3.2% variation in non-suicidal self-injurious behavior ($F_{1,299} = 9.89, p < .001$).

In step 2 the negative attribution style explained 23.7% additional variation in non-suicidal self-injurious behavior. Thus, indicating that both negative attribution style and depression cause a significant variation in non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.

The results in step 3 indicate that interaction effect explained 54.4% additional variation, thus, indicating that negative attribution style moderated the relationship between depression and non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.

Discussion

The present research explored the relationship between non-suicidal self-injurious behavior and depression. The study also examined the moderating role of negative attribution style in the relationship between the study

variables. A conveniently selected sample of 300 residents of shelter homes were approached and requested to participate in the research. The participants were given three scales; attribution style questionnaire, Ottawa self-injury inventory, and Zung self-rating depression scale.

The results of the study indicated that depression is positively associated with non-suicidal self-injurious behavior. The results are in line with previous researches.

The results also indicated the negative attribution style and its subtypes are positively related to non-suicidal self-injurious behavior among residents of shelter homes. Research is in line with previous literature as Muller et al. (2016) found the positive relationship between negative automatic thoughts and self-harm. Similarly, Barrocas et al. (2015) reported positive association between negative attribution style and non-suicidal self-injury in adolescence.

The results of the study found that there is positive relationship between depression and negative attribution style and its subtypes. Longmire (2024) reported the positive association between depression and negative attribution style. Aftab (2021) also reported that there is positive association between negative attribution style and depression.

The results of the study indicated that depression is the significant predictor of non-suicidal self-injurious behavior. It caused 3.2% variation in non-suicidal self-injurious behavior. Liu et al. (2021) found that depression significantly predicted non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors among Chinese adolescents. Bucur et al. (2021) and Aftab (2021) reported that depression acts as a significant predictor of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors.

The results of the study indicated that negative attribution style moderated the relationship between depression and self-injurious behavior among residents of shelter homes. Previous studies indicated that having negative attributions leads to more depressive symptoms that in turns leads to self-injurious behavior (Frankline et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Results of the current study concluded that negative attribution style, depression and non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors are positively related to each other. Depression is a significant positive predictor of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors. Results also concluded that negative attributional style moderated the relationship between depression and non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors.

Limitation and Suggestions

The limitations and suggestions of the current study are as under:

1. The current study included a small geographical area of Pakistan, a larger representative sample of different geographical local can increase the generalizability of the research.
2. The present research was based on self-reported measure only, that may result in desirability bias. Non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors needed to be confirmed from other sources as well.

Implications of the study

The study provided an insight into how negative attributions can increase the likelihood of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors among depressed individuals especially who are living in shelter homes. This valuable insight is helpful for the mental health practitioners, clinical psychologists, social mobilizers and others to gain an understanding of the interrelationship among negative attribution styles, depression and non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors. Thus, this study can be helpful to design future interventions based on targeting the relationships among the study variables.

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