Adolescents' depression, self-perceived success in academic domain, vulnerability to depression and anxiety

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Abstract

This research is based on cognitive theories of depressive disorder (Beck, 1979), on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social-ecological perspective on human development, and on Harter (1999)'s phenomenological assumption about adolescents' self-perceptions. Aiming at identifying the relationships between level of adolescents' depression, vulnerability to depression, anxiety and self-perceived success in academic domain, this study presents the results of the differential and regression analyses of a 100 adolescents' nonclinical depression' scores according to the above mentioned variables.

1. Introduction

Adolescence, have been noted as particularly important for setting the stage for continued development through the life span as individuals begin to make choices and engage in a variety of activities that are influential on the rest of their lives" (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006, p.13). The nowadays society is more and more demanding toward the adolescents, confronts them with more and more opportunities and responsibilities and „This increased complexity and heterogeneity in the passage into adulthood make the late adolescent period more challenging than in the past"

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(Zarrett & Eccles, 2006, p.14) and in the same time expose him to a greater risk of negative health outcomes and to the development of depressive symptoms (Lipps et al., 2010, p.2).

Studies mention as risk factors for the development of depression in adolescence: personal factors such as vulnerability to depression (Carver & Ganellen, 1983), anxiety and poor self-confidence and protective factors against depression such as high confidence, in general, or in a specific domain (Richardson & Katzenellenbogen, 2005; Hammen, 2009).

Carver & Ganellen (1983) defined the vulnerability to depression by the summative effects of three cognitive tendencies: the tendency to adopt and maintain high standards, the tendency to make harsh self-critical responses to deviations from the standards and the tendency to over generalize the failures. *Anxiety* wasapproached in this study as a trait, as a stable characteristic (Sylvers et al., 2011). The adolescent's view of or him/her self as a competent and successful student is related but not identical with self concept and self esteem (Schwartz et al., 2006).

The current study focuses on relationships between nonclinical depression (with its typical symptoms) and the vulnerability to depression, anxiety and self-perceived success in academic domain amongst teenagers.

Based on existing conceptual and empirical work, it was hypothesised that: 1) the students' depression will be positively associated with their level of vulnerability to depression and anxiety and negatively associated with their level of self-perceived success in academic domain (H1); 2) the students' gender, age, level of self-perceived success in academic domain, level of vulnerability to depression, and level of anxiety will interact in differentiating simultaneously their depressive symptoms and the general level of depression (H2); 3) students' gender, age, level of self-perceived success in academic domain, level, of vulnerability to depression and of anxiety will predict students' level of depression.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Participants in this study were 100 adolescents, aged 17 – 19 years (M = 17.97, SD = .43), 41 male and 59 female, high school students in the 12th class (the final high school class) from Bucharest, Romania. Because the focus of this study was the adolescents' nonclinical depression (with its typical symptoms), only participants that reportded that they were not in a specialised treatment for a psychological disorder were included in the study.

2.2. Instruments

To evaluate adolescents' depressive symptoms, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-13) (Beck et al., 1996) was used. BDI-13 contains 13 items that measures depressive symptoms, corresponding to criteria in DSM-IV (Vanheule et al., 2008). The scores of the 13 items are totalized to obtain a general indicator of depression ranging from 0 to 52, higher scores representing a more severe depression. A score of above 20 suggests moderate depression and of 29 or more suggests severe depression (Richardson & Katzenellenbogen, 2005). The vulnerability to depression was evaluated by the Attitudes toward Self Scale/ATS (Carver & Ganellen, 1983), a scale with 10 items assessing the tendencies 1) to maintain high standards; 2) to make harsh self-critical responses to deviations from standards; 3) to generalize the failure (e.g., "I get angry with myself if my efforts don't lead to the results I wanted"). The anxiety was measured with the Anxiety Test - Abridged (PsychTests.com) a scale containing 10 items that asked the participants to rate in a 5 point Likert scale the extent to which the statements describe their feelings (e.g. "My worries are overwhelming"). The self-perceived success in academic domain was evaluated by 3 items that expressly required the evaluation on a 5 points Likert scale (from 1 = to a very low extent to 5 = to a very high extent) of the extent to which the students think they are successful at school (e.g. "I consider myself a successful student."). The Cronbach alpha coefficients of these scales are shown in table 1.