



Brief report

Hopelessness in undergraduate students around the world: A review



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ABSTRACT

A search was made for all studies which administered the Beck Hopelessness Scale to undergraduate students. Sixty-one studies were found for the United States and 28 for other countries. The mean scores of American students on the Hopelessness Scale were significantly lower than those of students in other nations, and there was a small but significant trend for the hopeless scores of American students to have increased from 1978 to 2010.

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1. Introduction

The Hopelessness Scale (Beck et al., 1974), originally labeled as a measure of pessimism, was published formally in 1974 and, since then, scores of studies have utilized the scale. The present paper reviewed this body of research to identify studies that reported mean scores for undergraduate students in order to explore (1) whether there are trends in the scores over time in the United States and (2) how scores of students in the United States compare with the scores of students in other countries.

Hopelessness Scale scores have been found to correlate with past and current suicidal ideation and behavior and to predict future suicide behavior. For example, Beck et al (1990) found that psychiatric patients who scored 9 or higher on the HS were 11 more times likely to subsequently complete suicide than patients scoring 8 or lower.

2. Method

A search was made using PSYCINFO for all articles using the word “hopelessness” from 1974 to 2010. Some articles used the Beck Hopelessness Scale (HS), but failed to give mean scores of the groups tested. These articles are, therefore, not cited. Others provided mean scores for the HS, but omitted the sex distribution of the sample, the mean age of the sample or the standard deviation of the HS scores. The data for these studies were included in the present meta-analysis. Finally, occasional articles stated that they used a subsample of the 20 items while others switched to a Likert-type scoring system or a scoring system which produced scores outside the possible range of scores (e.g., Joiner et al., 2005b). (The HS uses a true–false format for 20 items,

and scores can range from 0 to 20.) Data from these studies were also excluded from the present meta-analysis.

Two previous papers have reviewed mean scores of students (and others) on the HS. Dozois et al (2003) reviewed 25 studies, of which 15 were based on undergraduate students, while Poch et al (2004) reviewed 15 studies of which 5 were based on undergraduate students. The present paper reports data from 89 studies

3. Results

The results of the review are shown in Table 1. Over all 89 studies, the mean HS score was 3.26, with a range of 1.16–7.63. The standard deviation of these mean scores was 1.18. The mean score for the 61 American samples was 2.97 (SD=0.83) and for all 28 foreign samples 3.89 (SD=1.55), a significant difference ($t=3.66$, $df=87$, two-tailed $p < 0.001$). Only Australia and Canada had at least five samples, but the scores of students in these two nations did not differ significantly from the scores of American students ($F=0.63$, $df=2,68$, $p=0.53$).

For the 61 American samples, the mean HS score was not significantly associated with the percentage of men in the samples (Pearson $r=-0.08$), the sample size ($r=-0.03$), or the mean age of the sample ($r=-0.09$). However, the mean HS score did increase over time ($r=0.25$, two-tailed $p=0.05$).

4. Discussion

This review identified 89 studies in which samples of undergraduate students had been administered the Beck Hopelessness Scale and which reported mean scores—61 from the United States and 28 from other nations. Overall, the scores on the scale of American students were lower than those of students from other countries. Only three studies reported scores of students from two countries (Abdel-Khalek and Lester, 2000; Lester and

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Table 1
Mean hopelessness scores of the undergraduate samples.

	Nation		n	Mean (SD)	Sex (m/f)	Mean age
Tolor (1978)	USA		134	2.37	60/74	22.2
		males	60	2.28 (2.19)		
		females	74	2.45 (1.78)		
Malloy and Fyfe (1980)	USA		91	2.06 (2.05)	35/56	24.3
Schotte and Clum (1982)	USA		175	2.97	87/88	
Durham (1982)	USA		197	2.32 (2.25)	95/102	20.7
Cole (1988)	USA		130	2.3 (2.5)	83/47	20.1
Cole and Milstead (1989)	USA		202	2.68 (3.09)		
Range and Antonelli, (1990)	USA		308	2.10 (2.73)	119/166	20.0
Rudd (1990)	USA		737	2.26	287/450	18
		males	287	2.2 (2.7)		
		females	450	2.3 (2.5)		
Strang and Orlofsky (1990)	USA		191	2.97	92/99	
Dixon et al. (1991)	USA		382	2.51 (3.04)	191/191	18 & 19
Reynolds (1991)	USA		474	3.25 (2.99)	152/299	21.0
Woods, et al. (1991)	USA		273	2.52	43/230	
Brackney and Westman (1992) ^a	USA		108	2.8 (3.5)	29/79	28.5
Dixon et al. (1992)	USA		143	2.77 (3.47)	54/89	18–19
			250	2.31 (2.73)	120/130	18–19
Nottingham et al. (1992)	USA	predominantly white	100	1.82 (1.69)	34/66	20.1
		predominantly black	102	1.60 (2.83)	43/59	18.8
Whatley and Clopton (1992)	USA		305	2.55 (3.01)	90/215	18–24
		males	90	2.09 (2.41)		
		females	215	2.74 (3.22)		
Ahrens and Haaga (1993)	USA		93	3.85 (3.99)	20/74	
Dixon et al. (1993)	USA		154	2.73 (3.47)	54/89/11	18/19
Priester and Clum (1993)	USA		303	2.77 (3.1)		
Shorkey and Whiteman (1993)	USA		241	2.0 (2.1)	40/184(!)	22.7
Whisman and Kwon (1993)	USA		80	2.25 (2.29)	27/53	18.9
Crocker et al. (1994)	USA		222	3.12	120/102	
		White	96	2.26 (2.37)	50/46	
		Black	91	2.92 (3.62)	48/43	
		Asian	35	5.97 (5.06)	22/13	
Chang et al. (1994)	USA		389	4.12 (3.90)	173/216	19.5
Alford, et al. (1995)	USA		154	3.43 (3.31)	71/83	
		Males	71	2.94 (2.96)		
		Females	83	3.73 (3.34)		
Joiner and Rudd (1995)	USA		203	2.21 (3.02)	89/114	19.3
Joiner et al. (1995)	USA	Females	64	3.92 (8.43)	19	
Dean et al. (1996)	USA		114	2.41 (3.94)	18/96	24.4
Hickman et al. (1996)	USA		324	2.67 (2.99)	116/208	20
Joiner and Rudd (1996)	USA		234	2.18 (3.09)	133/101	19.9
Weber et al. (1997)	USA		185	3.81 (3.92)	91/94	
Alloy and Clements (1998)	USA		100	3.95 (3.29)	46/54	18.9
Chang (1998)	USA		185			19.1
		Asian American	89	5.43 (4.95)	38/51	
		Caucasian American	96	3.18 (3.39)	32/64	
D'Zurilla et al. (1998)	USA		283	3.64 (4.02)	98/185	18.7
Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al (1998)	USA		343	5.59	168/175	19.9
Lester and Abdel-Khalek (1998)	USA		183	3.85 (4.04)	49/134	22.6
Stepakof (1998)	USA	Females	393	3.6 (3.22)	0/393	20
Eshun (1999)	USA		107	3.24 (3.44)	45/62	18.9
Lester (1999)	USA		69	2.4 (2.8)	21/48	24.2
Ralph and Mineka (1999)	USA		141	3.77 (3.23)	65/76	
Velting (1999)	USA		191	3.04 (3.38)	61/130	18.9
Abdel-Khalek and Lester (2000)	USA		144	3.9 (4.0)	38/106	20.3
Chang and Rand (2000)	USA		256	3.15 (3.71)	97/159	20.4
Upmanyu et al. (2000)	USA		142	2.58 (3.25)	71/71	22.5
Yang and Clum (2000)	USA		181	5.88	54/127	19.2
Halpin and Lester (2001)	USA		34	3.3 (4.0)	11/23	22.9
Kopper et al. (2001)	USA		214	2.23	75/139	20.3
		Males	75	1.89		
		Females	139	2.42		
Butt et al. (2003)	USA		136	3.4 (3.6)	60/76	
Wei et al. (2003)	USA		514	3.29 (3.05)	165/349	18.9
Wei et al. (2004)	USA		310	1.71	85/225	19.3
Kelly et al. (2005)	USA		245	2.92	131/114	
		Males	131	3.2 (3.2)		
		Females	114	2.6 (3.2)		
Konick and Gutierrez (2005)	USA		345	3.08 (3.17)	114/231	19
Joiner et al. (2005a)	USA		95	2.48 (2.34)	35/60	
Gibb et al. (2006)	USA		230	3.15 (3.96)	67/163	19.3
Hirsch and Connor (2006)	USA		284	3.02 (3.39)	99/185	21.0
Gencoz et al. (2007)	USA		419	2.31 (2.73)	103/316	21.2
Hirsch et al. (2007)	USA		138	4.46 (3.42)	38/100	22.5

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