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PII: S0165-1781(15)30272-9
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2016.06.014>
Reference: PSY9765

To appear in: *Psychiatry Research*

Received date: 3 September 2015
Revised date: 11 June 2016
Accepted date: 12 June 2016

Cite this article as: Xiao Chen, Zhengzhi Feng, Tao Wang, Hong Su and Lihong Zhang, Internal switching and backward inhibition in depression and rumination *Psychiatry Research*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2016.06.014>

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Internal switching and backward inhibition in depression and rumination

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Abstract

Prior research has suggested that impairments of switching abilities are associated with depression as well as rumination. Backward inhibition (BI) refers to the ability to inhibit the processing of previously relevant information and is demonstrated to be one of the key mechanisms underlying switching abilities. However, the association between BI in internal switching and depression/rumination remains uninvestigated. To examine this association, a modified Internal Shifting Task (IST) was administered to a sample of dysphoric and healthy control undergraduates. Results showed that depressive symptoms were not associated with difficulties in switching among subjects held in working memory, while trait ruminators performed poorly in switching internally. Surprisingly, no association between BI in internal switching and rumination/depressive symptoms was found. These findings indicate that rumination is characterized by poor performance in internal switching, but this deficit is not associated with BI.

Key words: Executive function; Cognition; Mental health; Vulnerability factor

1 Introduction

Depression is one of the most common mental disorders and represents a significant public health concern due to its prevalence, associated impairments and economic impact (Andrews et al., 2005; Phillips et al., 2009; Steinert et al., 2014). Although there have been a number of effective pharmacological and psychological interventions, relapse rates of depression remain high (Steinert et al., 2014). Given its high prevalence and relapse rates, it is pressing to identify the possible vulnerability factors and underlying mechanisms behind it. Rumination, which is

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