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An Investigation of the relationship between depression, meaning in life and adult hope

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Abstract

Depression is one of the most common mental health problems in the world, so identifying variables that are related to it is very important. The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between depression, meaning in life and hope. All 215 participants which were students were asked to complete the Beck Depression Inventory (1961), the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (in press) and Adult Hope Scale (AHS) (2002). The data of the study were analyzed by using the Pearson correlation coefficient. The results showed that there is a significant negative correlation between depression with meaning life ($r = -0.479, p < .01$), Presence meaning in life subscale ($r = -0.511, p < .01$) and Search meaning in life subscale ($r = -0.286, p < .01$). Also, the statistically significant correlation exist between depression and adult hope ($r = -0.484, p < .01$). It was found positive significant correlation between subscales of hope and meaning in life. Attention to these factors to minimize depression and to promote the society general health would be helpful.

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Key words: depression, meaning in life and hope;

1. Introduction

The experience of meaning in life has been recognized as an important contributor to health and well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Wong & Fry, 1998). Indeed, in his classic work, Frankl (1963/1984) maintained that the need for meaning is a chronic, basic need (Heine, Travis, & Vohs, 2006). The importance of meaning in life is supported by research demonstrating its relations to a number of mental health variables such as depression, anxiety, hope, and life satisfaction (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989; Steger & Frazier, 2005; Zika & Chamberlain, 1987, 1992). Steger and his colleague (2009) sees meaning in life as the manner in which people feel their lives have purpose, and how they comprehend their experiences.

Depression is a kind of disorder which includes symptoms in mood, body, motivation and behavior area. The symptoms of this disorder are negative mood, loss of energy and interest, feeling of guilt, difficulty in concentration, reduction of appetite and thought of death and suicide. These symptoms lead to social, interpersonal and job dysfunction (Akiscal, 2005). The symptoms of depression are lying in the spectrum of depressive symptoms (preclinical), weak depression and finally clinical depression. Therefore these symptoms are different intensely and are from weak to intense (Kessing, 2007). As it mentioned, meaning in life, is one of the effective factors on depression. Also, according to relevant text (wong, & fry, 1998), the role of hope in meaning in life is obvious.

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Hope involves uncertain expectations and is a process in which a person has confidence in planning for a good, realistic, and personally significant future (Dufault and Martocchio, 1985). The literature attests to the effects of hopefulness and optimism on psychological and physical well-being (Anderson & Snyder, 1988; Elliott, Witty, Herrick, & Hoffman, 1991; Lewis & Kliever, 1996; Nunn, Lewin, Walton, & Carr, 1996; Sherwin et al., 1992; Snyder, Harris, et al., 1991; Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991). Moreover, research findings suggest that coping may be one of the possible pathways by which individual differences in hopefulness and optimism lead to the production of adaptive outcomes. That is, optimists and pessimists can be distinguished by the coping tactics that they employ when under stress (Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). Therefore, the present study aims to investigation of the relationship between depression, meaning in life and adult hope.

2. Method

The study population included students at Allameh Tabatabaei University in 2012-2013 years. Participants in this study included 56 male students (mean age = 22.52, SD = 3.99) and 158 female students (mean age 21.61, SD = 3.64) who were selected intentionally. After explaining the purpose of this research and gaining participant's consent, they were asked to complete the questionnaire of the study. In order to provide an environment that participants trust us, we use both female and male interviewers.

Description of Measure: The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) is the 13-item short form and the more recent BDI-11 by Beck, Steer & Brown, 1996. (Steer, Rissmiller & Beck, 2000) The BDI takes approximately 10 minutes to complete, although clients require a fifth – sixth grade reading level to adequately understand the questions (Groth-Marnat, 1990). Internal consistency for the BDI ranges from .73 to .92 with a mean of .86 (Beck, Steer & Garbin, 1988). Similar reliabilities have been found for the 13-item short form (Groth-Marnat, 1990). The BDI demonstrates high internal consistency, with alpha coefficients of .86 and .81 for psychiatric and non-psychiatric populations respectively (Beck et al., 1988).

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire assesses two dimensions of meaning in life using 10 items rated on a seven-point scale from "Absolutely True" to "Absolutely Untrue." The Presence of Meaning subscale measures how full respondents feel their lives are of meaning. The Search for Meaning subscale measures how engaged and motivated respondents are in efforts to find meaning or deepen their understanding of meaning in their lives. The MLQ has good reliability, test-retest stability, stable factor structure, and convergence among informants. Presence is positively related to well-being, intrinsic religiosity, extraversion and agreeableness, and negatively related to anxiety and depression. Search is positively related to religious quest, rumination, past-negative and present-fatalistic time perspectives, negative affect, depression, and neuroticism, and negatively related to future time perspective, close-mindedness (dogmatism), and well-being. Presence relates as expected with personal growth self-appraisals, and altruistic and spiritual behaviors as assessed through daily diaries. The MLQ takes about 5 minutes to complete. Also, 10 questions form of was used to measure meaning of life. The reliability of this form based on haAlp coefficient is 0.92. Mahdavian's result for getting the reliability of Enrich test based on Pearson correlation coefficients and using test-retest (one week interval) for men and women separately become 0.94. The way of scoring this test is according to the Likert scale and has seven options. The average score in this test is between 10-70, so people who get score in this range meet the average marital satisfaction criteria and are considered desirable. Ordinary, lower of 41 score or higher than 60 are considered as low and high marital satisfaction.

The adult hope scale (AHS) measures Snyder's cognitive model of hope which defines hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991, p. 287). The adult hope scale contains 12 items. Four items measure pathways thinking, four items measure agency thinking, and four items are fillers. Participants respond to each item using a 8-point scale ranging from definitely false to definitely true and the scale takes only a few minutes to complete. See Snyder (2002) for a review of hope theory and research. Cronbach alphas for the total score ranged from .74 to .84 for six samples of undergraduate college students and two samples of

individuals in psychological treatment. Test-retest correlations have been .80 or above over periods exceeding 10 weeks (Snyder et al., 1991).

3. Results

Data were analyzed by SPSS. The result of assessment of the correlation between the variables of research shows there is a negative relationship between Beck Depression scale and meaning in life ($r = -0.48$, $a = 0.01$). The relationship between depression and presence of meaning subscale is quietly strong and there is a strong negative relationship between agency and pathways as subscale of hope. ($a = 0.01$, $r = -0.52$, $a = 0.01$, $r = -0.62$). Finally the relationship between presence of meaning subscales with agency and pathways is positive and significant ($a = 0.01$, $r = 0.62$), ($a = 0.01$, $r = 0.53$).

Table 1 – correlation between Depression, Meaning of life & Adult hope

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Beck	1						
2. Meaning in Life	-.497**	1					
3. Search for Meaning subscale	-.286**	.773**	1				
4. Presence of Meaning subscale	-.511**	.834**	.313**	1			
5. agency (goal-directed energy)	-.623**	.688**	.313**	.755**	1		
6. pathways (planning to meet goals)	-.523**	.536**	.233**	.591**	.677**	1	
7. adult hope scale (AHS)	-.484**	.620**	.340**	.630**	.824**	.868**	1

4. Discussion

The results of this study show the strong significant relationship between depression and adult hope. This data is supported by Chimich & Nekolaichuks study (2004). Depression leads to reduction of happiness (Leimkühler, Heller, & Paulus, 2007) and life satisfaction (Peth, & elt, 2012). In other way Werner (2011) reports significant relationship between happiness and adult hope. Due to Jafari and et al.'s (2010) investigation on the relationship between hope, happiness and life satisfaction, the relationship between depression and adult hope is considered as happiness and life satisfaction under effect of common factors. Therefore if it cannot be said there is causative relationship between depression and hope, but their role in the relationship with common variables can be searched.

Also depression has significant negative relationship with meaning in life this result is supported by Steger and his colleague (2009) and Buchanan (1994). In the explanation of this relationship, low self-esteem can be considered. Low self-esteem has positive relationship between depression (Ruden, 2003, Fennell, 2004) and meaning in life (Staring, & et al, 2009). These factors can be effective in the relationship between depression and meaning in life.

Finally there is a positive significant relationship between adult hope and meaning in life. Wang's research (2004) shows the relationship between social support and adult hope. By considering the relationship between loss of meaning in life and social pressure which is examined in Stillman and his colleagues study (2009). Social support can be considered as a common factor between these variables.

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