Reviewer’s report

Title: Social inhibition as a mediator of neuroticism and depression in the elderly

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Reviewer: Jennifer Morse

Reviewer’s report:

This manuscript examines the relation between interpersonal problems, depressive symptoms and personality factors in the community sample of Thai elderly. The question posed is clear – whether social inhibition mediates the relation between emotional stability and depression – and the use of Baron & Kenny’s procedures and HLM is appropriate. Attending to several conceptual issues – the issue of concurrent data assessing variables thought to be of differing duration, what is assessed by the PF16 reasoning scale, and articulating the theoretical and clinical implications of the hypothesis and findings - would significantly strengthen the manuscript.

Major concerns:

The last line of the second paragraph and the third paragraph warrant further exposition. That is, the data collected is cross-sectional but the authors are arguing that the concepts of symptoms, interpersonal problems, and personality traits have different durations that imply a sense of timeline supporting their use of a mediation hypothesis and analysis. This makes some sense but should be more thoroughly explained in the introduction. In addition the section of the introduction would be improved if there were additional theoretical arguments or models that support mediation effect that they hypothesize. If there are no published models, the authors might expand the description of previous empirical results in order to argue for their own conceptual model suggesting that social inhibition would mediate the relation between neuroticism/emotional stability and depression.

At the beginning of the statistical analysis the authors say that they will examine the relation between depression and three potential confounders and the links between emotional stability and depressive symptoms – age, education, income, and intelligence. First a minor point, the list includes four variables. Next, a more important point, it is not clear why the authors focused on reasoning out of all the primary factors in the 16 PF. Their introduction has not touched on reasoning and so controlling for it seems to come out of the blue. In the results section the authors state that reasoning is not regarded as personality factor but rather a function of intellectual ability and thus was deemed to control variable. This order of presentation is confusing and more justification is needed for designating reasoning, an established scale on the 16 PF, not to be a personality factor. Throughout the remainder of the manuscript, the authors refer to “intelligence” which seems to warrant further justification and empirical support for the use of
the reasoning factor as a marker of cognitive ability.

The discussion currently focuses on re-iterating the findings. The authors could significantly strengthen the discussion if they expanded the connections between the previous research and the current findings to expand theoretical models of depression (e.g., expand Alden & Bieling’s work), to articulate their own model, and to reflect on the conceptual issue related to the longevity of symptoms, interpersonal problems, and personality traits. In addition, their stated goal was to use the results to improve prevention or treatments for depression, but they have not commented on any clinical implications of their findings.

Minor essential concerns:

The authors’ use of etc. is unhelpful. In the introduction to writing could be more clear if instead of ending lists with etc., the authors provided either a complete list or an accepted definition. Or in a case where they do not want to list all the possibilities (like listing all the measures that assessed neuroticism), the authors could use that as an opportunity to focus on the measure that they’re most interested in.

In the second line of the second paragraph, I believe the authors are first referring to the dependent type of depression but that is not clear. In that same paragraph the phrase “subset of the introversion trait” seems awkward. I believe it is more common to refer to facets of personality traits.

The clause beginning with i.e. in the third paragraph is confusing. I believe the authors are interested in one mediator not in the possibility of various different mediators but this should be clarified.

In the results section, first paragraph, the text seems to imply that reasoning was also correlated with depression because of the use of “also” in the sentence about the relation between intrusiveness and depression. The second sentence in the paragraph is quite long and confusing; breaking it into shorter sentences each of which addresses a correlational finding would be helpful to the reader.

In Table 1, the diagonal 1s make the table harder to read and are unnecessary. Also, there is an extra 1 and I wonder if some of the other correlations are also significant.

The abstract needs some revision. The background should state which factors were investigated. The Methods use the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (not Interpersonal Problem Inventory). The Results can simply state the percentage who were married and had low income – currently the report sounds conditional (“of those who”). The mediation finding should be clarified.

Discretionary revisions:

In instrument section, the description of the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems use a slightly different labels than I’m used to seeing in reference to the octants of the IIP. Perhaps this is partially a translation issue but either way a note indicating the more traditional labels (domineering, vindictive, cold, socially
avoidant, nonassertive, exploitable, overly nurturant, intrusive) would likely be helpful.

Minor issues not for publication:

The description of the SCL 90 would be more complete if the authors could include the Cronbach’s alpha for the Thai version. Also I believe there is a typo at the end of this description and that the authors are referring to known group technique.

I believe that the Cattell measure is actually called the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire, abbreviated 16 PF. And a small point, the statistics for test-retest reliability and internal consistency should probably have their statistical symbols.

At the end of the second paragraph regarding statistical analyses, I believe the word whether is missing – “whether it reduces” and that “indexing” is not required.

In the results section, first paragraph, a ) is missing.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.