Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 23 May 2011

Reviewer: Julie Wetherell

Reviewer’s report:

This manuscript used regression and path analysis to examine the relationships among interpersonal functioning, personality, and depressive symptoms in a cross-sectional survey of 123 older adults in Thailand. Results suggest that lack of emotional stability, mediated by social inhibition, is associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. Please provide more information about the sample. Specifically, was this "national survey" demographically representative of Thailand? How were prospective respondents identified? How many were approached, and how? How many refused?

2. I am skeptical about the ability of a self-report personality scale to adequately measure intelligence. Please either provide citations to support a strong relationship between the 16PF and standard intelligence or neuropsychological tests, or else rephrase to describe the measure more accurately as "self-reported intellectual interests" or "openness to experience" or whatever the 16PF questions actually assess.

3. Although the inclusion of social inhibition does reduce the strength of the association between low emotional stability and depressive symptoms, the magnitude of the change (-0.29 to -0.25 in the abstract and figure, -0.29 to -0.26 in the text of the Results and in the table - therefore the abstract and figure need to be changed) seems small. Is this difference statistically significant? Do Baron and Kenny or other methodologists provide guidance on how much change in regression coefficients is required in order to conclude that mediation is present?

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The direction of the relationships should be identified in the writing. For example (from the abstract): "Emotional stability yielded the highest standardized regression coefficient" with depressive symptoms is strictly speaking accurate but leaves the impression that high levels of emotional stability are associated with high levels of depression. Better to rephrase as "low levels of emotional stability were most strongly associated with depressive symptoms" or similar phrasing. Similarly, it should be made clear that low levels of intellectual curiosity or whatever the authors decide to rename what they are currently calling intellectual ability/reasoning are associated with depressive symptoms.
2. In the Background section, "IIP" needs to be spelled out the first time it appears.

3. The authors indicate that the SCL-90 was developed for people aged 15-67 years of age, yet they are using it in a sample ranging in age from 60-93. Please add citations to validation studies in older, ideally Thai, adults.

4. Because the sample is not clinically depressed, references to SCL-90 scores should be to "depressive symptoms" rather than to depression.

5. Please number the variables in the left column of Table 1 in order to make it easier to read.

6. Please include page numbers in any subsequent revisions to facilitate review.

Discretionary Revisions
1. I was curious to read that social inhibition is not considered very stable. It seems as though it would be related to the construct of behavioral inhibition, which is highly stable - it can be measured in infants and predicts anxiety disorders later in life. Consider clarifying this.

2. In the Results, the authors state that there is a "lack of a clear theoretical rationale indicating that the interpersonal style of intrusive needy confers risk of depression". Really?

3. It seems to me that one of the factors that would distinguish this article from others is that it is a sample of older Thais, and yet cultural issues are not mentioned in the text. Do we know that geriatric depression is a similar phenomenon in Thailand as elsewhere (for example, similar prevalence rates, similar symptoms as in other countries)?

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.