Reviewer’s report

Title: Disorder-specific cognitive profiles in major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder.

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Reviewer: Vladan Starcevic

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Comments to the authors of article “Disorder-specific cognitive profiles in major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder”

This study compares several cognitive constructs in major depressive disorder (MDD) and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and reports that levels of hopelessness/suicidality and rumination were significantly higher in MDD, whereas anxiety sensitivity for physical concerns and pathological worry were significantly more prominent in GAD. Individuals with both MDD and GAD had “more extreme depression cognitions” compared to individuals with MDD and GAD alone and a “similar anxiety profile” compared to individuals with GAD alone. The authors conclude that these findings support the notion that MDD and GAD are distinct conditions and that they should be classified accordingly.

I have a number of comments and suggestions, as follows:

“MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS”

1) Three instruments were used in the study, of which two (Anxiety Sensitivity Index [ASI] and Penn State Worry Questionnaire [PSWQ]) are very well known, whereas one (Leiden Index of Depression Sensitivity; LEIDS-R) is much less used. The authors might make a comment about the reason for choosing the latter and not choosing an alternative measure such as the Cognitions Checklist that they mention on page 11.

2) Also with regards to the LEIDS-R, the reported Cronbach alpha values (ranging from 0.55 to 0.83) were not convincing. The authors should make some comment about that and also about the acceptability of this instrument more generally.

3) It was unusual to use the ASI without two of its items and to administer the PSWQ without five items. Can authors justify this?

4) The authors only report frequencies of co-occurring panic disorder and social phobia. What about other co-occurring disorders, for example posttraumatic stress disorder and specific phobia? Was there any other psychopathology, such as personality disorders or eating disorders? It is important to provide data about other co-occurring conditions because they might have affected the scores on the instruments used in the study.
5) Discussion is rather “thin” and would benefit from less repetitiveness and a more thoughtful examination of the issues. In particular, the authors do not discuss in sufficient detail the reasons for discrepant findings between studies.

6) This study’s findings can also be interpreted as suggesting that there were more similarities between MDD and GAD than there were significant differences. Table 2 shows that MDD and GAD individuals did not differ significantly with respect to the scores on acceptance/coping, aggression, control/perfectionism, risk aversion and anxiety sensitivity for social-cognitive concerns (5 subscales), with significant differences being found on the scores on hopelessness/suicidality, rumination, anxiety sensitivity for physical concerns and pathological worry (4 scales/subscales). How does this support the notion that MDD and GAD are distinct?

7) The pattern of results for individuals with both MDD and GAD is clearer and may suggest that this co-occurrence denotes a more severe illness. Again, a more detailed discussion of this is missing.

8) The authors note that their results show that “rumination is specific for MDD whereas worry is specific for GAD” (p. 11). This is a definitive statement, which does not follow from the results: a significantly higher mean score on a measure of pathological worry in individuals with GAD does not automatically mean that pathological worry is specific for GAD, and the same applies to rumination and MDD. More thought should be put into a discussion of the similarities and differences between pathological worry and ruminations and findings of this study need to be compared to those of previous research.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.