Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 24 August 2013

Reviewer: Regina Miranda

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This study examined cognitive factors that would distinguish between depression, GAD, and mixed depression/GAD, based on the tripartite and cognitive content-specificity models of anxiety and depression. Participants were recruited as part of the Netherlands Study of Depression and Anxiety (NESDA). In multivariate analyses, individuals with major depression (MDD) were distinguished from those with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) by higher scores on a measure of hopelessness/suicidality and rumination, and by lower pathological worry and anxiety sensitivity involving physical concerns. MDD was distinguished from comorbid MDD/GAD by lower pathological worry, and GAD was distinguished from comorbid MDD/GAD by lower hopelessness/suicidality, rumination, anxiety sensitivity involving social concerns, and by higher anxiety sensitivity involving physical concerns.

This study has the potential to contribute to the literature on cognitive distinctions between GAD and MDD and is relevant, given recent discussions leading to DSM-V on whether or not to classify GAD with MDD. The study has several strengths, including sample size, comparison of “pure” GAD and MDD to comorbid MDD/GAD, and assessment of cognitive constructs previously found to distinguish between depression and anxiety. Analyses also adjusted for panic disorder and social phobia.

The following are suggestions for improving the manuscript:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The paper is written as if DSM-V is not yet out. It should be revised in light of the fact that DSM-V has been released.

2. The introduction should add more review of the literature on the tripartite and cognitive content specificity models and include more recent studies.

3. Need more specificity on the types of depressive and anxious cognitions to which the authors are referring in the studies reviewed in the third paragraph and also better review of the literature on the relation between these cognitions and depression/anxiety.

4. In the method section, it would be useful to include the number of items in each subscale of the LEIDS-R, along with Cronbach’s alpha for each subscale, given the wide range (from .55-.83). This is important, given that the
anxiety-related scales seem to have more adequate alpha levels, which may impact the findings.

5. Age, gender, and education, which are presently at the beginning of the results section, should go in the method section with the description of the sample. In addition, the description of the sample should include number of participants in the final sample (and number in each group), even though this is included in Table 1.

6. One limitation that was not addressed was the retrospective nature of the study. What the analyses did not address was whether the cognitive constructs examined were causes or consequences of the disorders. While not critical to the conclusions drawn, this issue should be mentioned in the discussion.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The authors should proofread the language in the paper. For instance, under the statistical analyses section, the sentence, “We analysed effect sizes as a standardized indication of the size of found contrasts…” is awkwardly worded and thus difficult to understand. There were a few other instances of awkward wording, and the authors should proofread.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests.