Author's response to reviews

Title: Autobiographical memory and hierarchical search strategies in depressed and non-depressed participants

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Journal name: BMC Psychiatry

Dear Editor,

I would like to submit the attached manuscript titled “Autobiographical memory and hierarchical search strategies in depressed and non-depressed participants” for publication as a regular article in BMC Psychiatry.

This study examined the hierarchical search sequence used to recall autobiographical memories in depressed and non-depressed participants, with a view to determining whether depressed participants exhibited truncated search strategies. Although ample studies have investigated the specificity of autobiographical memory in depressed patients, and have examined the roles of rumination, affect regulation and attention in the relationship between over-general memory and depression, few studies have examined the sequencing of memory retrieval exhibited by depressed individuals, to determine whether they retrieve information in the hierarchical fashion as proposed by Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000).

While non-clinical participants have been shown to access life time period knowledge, followed by general event knowledge and event specific knowledge (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce’s knowledge hierarchy) when retrieving an autobiographical memory, it is unclear whether depressed individuals also access memories in this manner, or whether the search sequence differs. Understanding how depressed individuals access the knowledge hierarchy may aid in developing more effective methods of enhancing recall of specific memories, and of facilitating effective problem solving in this population. Given the novelty of research objectives that we addressed in this paper, we strongly believe that it would be worth of a publication.

We’ve made some changes in the manuscript as advised.
1. Acknowledgements are added in page 20.
2. A section called “Competing interests” is added in page 20 as well.
3. The reasons for this paper to be published are highlighted in this letter (see above). Our study adheres to the RATS guidelines for the reporting standards in qualitative studies. With regards to the ethical clearance, we obtained approval from the Postgraduate Thesis Committee (PGTC) at the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences as there was no formal ethics committee at the university where this study was conducted (stated in page 9). PGTC thoroughly checked the ethical and other relevant issues pertaining to this study and gave full clearance. A section on “Statistical methods” is added in page 11.

Finally, please do take note that the manuscript has not been submitted for publication elsewhere. My contact details are as below.

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