RUMINATION, COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOURAL AVOIDANCE AND DEPRESSION IN AN AUSTRALIAN CLINICAL SAMPLE

David Wells, Nerina Caltabiano & Marie Caltabiano
James Cook University

ABSTRACT:
The study re-investigated the factor structure of the Cognitive-Behavioural Avoidance Scale (Ottenbreit & Dobson, 2004). The study then investigated the relationship between avoidance, rumination and depression in terms of gender, age, life events and unique variance using the re-investigated scale to measure cognitive-behavioural avoidance. Participants consisted of 158 severely depressed and anxious inpatients; there were 75 men (mean age of 49.9 years) and 83 females (mean age of 44.6 years). Participants completed the Cognitive-Behavioural Avoidance Scale; the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale; Brief COPE; The Ways of Coping Questionnaire – Escape – Avoidance Scale and the Response Styles Questionnaire – Escaping – Avoidance Scale. The Cognitive-Behavioural Avoidance Scale was a valid instrument for measurement of avoidance in this sample but, after factor analysis, it differed in its subscale structure from the original published version. Females had higher scores on all constructs; overall use of rumination decreases with age but there were different results for the three constructs when age by gender was examined; interpersonal life events were important for all participants and avoidance did contribute unique variance to the construct of depression.

“...we ruminate, we become fruitlessly preoccupied with the fact that we are unhappy and with the causes, meanings, and consequences of our unhappiness.” — Mark Williams, *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*

**Design**
The study used a survey methodology with a self-reported questionnaire. All participants were volunteers.

**Recruitment of Participants**
Participants were recruited from inpatients and day patients of a treatment clinic on the Gold Coast and from the private patients of the associated medical and allied health staff of the clinic.

**Measures:**
The Ways of Coping Questionnaire – Escape – Avoidance Scale (WCQ: Folkman & Lazarus, 1985)
The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS- 21 item; Loviband & Loviband, 1995)

**Demographic items:** gender, age ......

**Study 1 – Aim:** To validate the new measurement instrument for avoidance, the Cognitive-Behavioural Avoidance Scale (CBAS) using a clinical sample from a psychiatric hospital.

The overall Cognitive Behavioural Avoidance Scale was found to be a valid and reliable measure when used in the current clinical sample. The Behavioural Model of Depression suggested that use of avoidance coping strategies by depressed persons is common. Factor analysis could only justify and interpret three factors which accounted for 45.28% an amount greater than Ottenbreit and Dobson’s (2004) solution where they accounted for 44.95%. The new three factors are: Behavioural Social, Task Avoidance and Cognitive Avoidance.

**Study 2 – Aim:** An examination of the relationship between avoidance, as measured by the Cognitive-Behavioural Avoidance Scale, and rumination in psychiatric patients specifically focussing on depression.

**Hypothesis 1:** That there will be gender differences in avoidance, rumination and depression.

Examination of the gender differences between the measures for depression, avoidance and rumination showed females had higher scores than males on depression, Task Avoidance and rumination. The hypothesis, as predicted by the Cognitive Vulnerability – Transactional Stress Theory is supported.

**Hypothesis 2:** That there will be age differences in avoidance, rumination and depression.

Age is positively associated with months since diagnosis and anxiety but decreases the use of rumination. When examining gender, age has almost the opposite impact for each of the genders. For females there is only a significant correlation between age and CBAS-CA whilst for males this is the only relationship that is not significant. For males increasing age decreases the use of, or the association with, all variables except months since diagnosis.

**Hypothesis 3:** That significant life events precede depression.

Significant life events did not precede diagnosis in the present research. The mean time since diagnosis for participants was about five years. The hypothesis, which has its basis in Skinners Operant Conditioning, is not supported.

**Hypothesis 4:** That after controlling for anxiety and rumination, avoidance will contribute unique variance in the prediction of depression. This hypothesis is supported.