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Investigating the Relationship between Perceived Partner Responsiveness and the Degree of Depression Symptoms According to the Moderating Role of Fear of Compassion

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Extended Abstract

Aim

This research investigates the relationship between Perceived Partner Responsiveness (Reis et al., 2017) and levels of Anaclitic (relationship-based) and Introjective (self-based) depression symptoms, following the theory of Blatt (2004). The moderating role of Fear of Compassion (Gilbert et al., 2011) in this relationship was also examined. Anaclitic depression is characterized by feelings of loss, loneliness, and the destruction of interpersonal relationships (Blatt, 2004), while Introjective depression is rooted in intense feelings of low self-worth and threats to one's integrated identity (Blatt, 2004). Childhood experiences of deprivation contribute to the formation of these two types of depression, which can also lead to fear of compassion (Blatt, 2004; Gilbert et al., 2011). This study aims to identify the interpersonal and intrapersonal factors affecting the development of Anaclitic and Introjective depression by extending the model of Feeny and Collins (2015), which outlines the interpersonal processes involved in providing strength and relational support for thriving. In this study, Perceived Partner Responsiveness and Fear of Compassion were incorporated into the Feeny and Collins (2015) model as interpersonal and intrapersonal factors, respectively. Perceived Partner Responsiveness serves as the independent variable, while Fear of Compassion acts as the moderator. According to the literature, Fear of Compassion, as an attachment-based construct, may elucidate how Perceived Partner Responsiveness relates to negative outcomes such as Anaclitic and Introjective depression in couples. Initially, we examined the relationship between Perceived Partner Responsiveness and Fear of Compassion with attachment separately, followed by an analysis of three forms of Fear of Compassion as moderator variables.

Methodology

The methodology employed a practical approach and adhered to a descriptive correlation model. The target population comprised all married individuals residing in Iran in 2022. A sample of 439 participants was selected, consisting of 349 females and 90 males, chosen through random sampling. The questionnaires were completed in March and April 2022, with an average completion time of 27 minutes. Data were collected using the Re-constructed Depression Experience Questionnaire (RecDEQ) (Bagby et al., 1994), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996), Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS) (Reis & Carmichael, 2006 cited by Reis et al., 2017), and the Fear of Compassion Scale (FCS) (Gilbert et al., 2011). All data collection procedures were conducted online, and subsequent analyses were carried out using correlation and regression tests within SPSS-26 software.

Findings

The results indicated a significant inverse relationship between Perceived Partner Responsiveness and the levels of Anaclitic and Introjective depression symptoms ($P < 0.001$), with the relationship

between Perceived Partner Responsiveness and Introjective depression being stronger than that with Anaclitic depression. Fear of Compassion from others, Fear of self-compassion, and Fear of compassion for others also exhibited direct and significant relationships with Anaclitic and Introjective depression symptoms ($P < 0.001$). The correlation of Fear of Compassion dimensions with Introjective depression was stronger than with Anaclitic depression. Anaclitic depression correlated with Fear of Compassion from others, Fear of self-compassion, and Fear of compassion for others, respectively. The correlation of Introjective depression with Fear of Compassion from others and Fear of self-compassion was stronger than with Fear of compassion for others. Additionally, Fear of Compassion from others moderated the relationship between Perceived Partner Responsiveness and Anaclitic depression ($P = 0.01$).

Conclusion

This study enhances Blatt's (2004) theory regarding the underlying and supportive factors of Anaclitic and Introjective depression by extending the model of Feeney and Collins (2015). The findings suggest that the dimensions of Fear of Compassion have a stronger relationship with Anaclitic and Introjective depression than Perceived Partner Responsiveness does with these two types of depression. Moreover, Fear of Compassion from others can moderate the impact of Perceived Partner Responsiveness on Anaclitic depression. Thus, attention to Fear of Compassion as a developmental construct is beneficial for theorizing, understanding etiology, and designing treatments to alleviate depression symptoms in married individuals. It is noteworthy that clinical psychologists can directly apply these findings. By differentiating types of experiences in depression, this research represents a significant step toward understanding clinical depression and its treatment. Future studies could enhance results by incorporating couple-reports alongside self-reports.

Keywords: Anaclitic, Depression, Fear of Compassion, Introjective, Perceived Responsiveness.

Ethical Considerations

Participants received a written explanation of the study's topic, location, and methods, along with information about the researcher's academic credentials. They were informed of confidentiality and privacy rules and asked to confirm their consent. The research ethics code was obtained from the Research Ethics Working Group of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at Tehran University (IR.UT.PSYEDU.REC.1401.078).

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest associated with this article.

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