“The Invisible Fences of Adult ADHD”: How negative thinking affects coping with ADHD

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ROLE OF NEGATIVE THINKING AND ADULT ADHD: RESEARCH

Depression in Adults with ADHD: The Mediating Role of Cognitive-Behavioral Factors
Knouse et al. (2013). Cognitive Therapy & Research, online

METHODS
Participants included 77 adults clinically diagnosed with ADHD.

Participants completed: (a) diagnostic interviews to establish past and current diagnoses of ADHD and depressive disorders; (b) clinician administered rating scales assessing ADHD and depressive symptoms, and stressful life events; and (c) self-report questionnaires measuring ADHD symptom severity (CSS), depressive symptoms (BDI), dysfunctional beliefs (DAS) and behavioral avoidance (CBAS).

Analyses were conducted to determine the relative contribution of (a) ADHD symptoms, (b) dysfunctional beliefs, and (c) cognitive-behavioral avoidance to self-reported depression symptoms and current depressive diagnosis.
Depression in Adults with ADHD: The Mediating Role of Cognitive-Behavioral Factors

Knouse et al. (2013). Cognitive Therapy & Research, online

Results indicated that both dysfunctional beliefs and cognitive-behavioral avoidance accounted for depressive symptoms – these independent variables partially mediated the other, suggesting overlapping and unique variance. Cognitive-behavioral avoidance was more strongly correlated to diagnostic criteria for MDD than dysfunctional beliefs.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

"Struggling with ADHD may contribute to the development of negative self-schemas and increase the actual occurrence of salience of failure experiences, contributing to depressive symptoms. At the same time, ADHD symptoms may initially contribute to a more avoidant cognitive and behavioral style that becomes more pervasive and impairing as depressive symptoms worsen.

Treatment of patients who are “at-risk” for depression (i.e. dysthymia) should focus on both modification of dysfunctional attitudes and establishment of active coping patterns. Treatment of patients who are depressed should shift toward more behavioral activation and more active coping patterns."

Are Negative Automatic Thoughts Associated with ADHD in Adulthood?


METHODS

Participants included 81 adults clinically diagnosed with ADHD.

n=34 ADHD+depression, n=47 ADHD-depression, n=43 non-clinical controls

Measures = CAARS Inattentive, ATQ, BDI

ADHD+depression > ADHD-depression > controls on measure of negative thinking (ATQ)
METHODOLOGY

Participants included 35 adults with ADHD, 20 non-clinical controls, and 20 non-ADHD clinical controls.

Measures: ADHD-RS, ATQ, DAS, BDI, STAI, WOCS, AAQoL.

ADHD, non-ADHD clinical controls > non-clinical controls ATQ, DAS

Negative thoughts associated with emotions; ADHD also had high escape-avoidance coping

ADHD + emotions + escape-avoidance predicts life impairment

Research Summary

- Negative thinking plays a distinct role in ADHD (and co-existing mood, though not necessarily)

- Hx of ADHD associated with setback that can increase negative self-view which creates another source of setbacks

- More negative emotions, negative thoughts, avoidant behaviors, and impairments
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ROLE OF NEGATIVE THINKING AND ADULT ADHD: COPING

Life Outcomes: Adult ADHD

- Workplace problems
- Relationship problems
- Lower educational attainment
- Employment problems
- Lower self-esteem
- Lower social functioning
- Lower satisfaction in life domains
- Physical health issues
- Legal issues
- Lower SES
- Psychiatric comorbidity
- Substance use disorders
- Risk for suicide (SUD + psychiatric)

Harpin et al. (2013). Journal of Attention Disorders, online ahead of print.

Living with ADHD

- Executive Function Deficits
- Motivational Deficits/Reward Deficiency
- Most activities of life will be more difficult
- You may not be aware of the impact of ADHD and poor self-regulation
Living with ADHD (2)

- More “shocks” when facing life endeavors, daily tasks, responsibilities, etc.
- Negative/aversive EMOTIONAL associations
- BEHAVIORAL avoidance
- COGNITIVE TRIAD = Negative view of self, world, future
- Learned pessimism

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WHAT ARE SOME OF THE COMMON TRIGGERS FOR NEGATIVE THOUGHTS (FLAGS)

Triggering Events

- School
- Work
- Relationships
- Business of daily life, chores
- Money
- Performance situations
- Delay of gratification
- Mundane stuff
- “Face Boasting”
- Self care
- Interactions
- Transitions
- Others???
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NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Automatic Thoughts

• Reflexive reaction to an event
• Occur quickly, just out of awareness (Freud’s preconscious)
• Can catch when attending to them
• Easily distorted
• Affect emotions, behaviors, further thoughts
  (First a.t. can be an “event” for another a.t.)

Distortions and ADHD

• Magnification / minimization
• Comparative thinking
• Jumping to conclusions (future, mind-read)
• Magical thinking / positive bias
Distortions and ADHD (2)

• Emotional reasoning (feeling = fact)

• Catastrophize, overgeneralize, all-or-nothing

• Should (rigid standard)

• Labeling ("I’m a loser.")

Connection of Emotions and Thoughts

• Depression = loss, failure

• Anxiety = threat, risk

• Guilt/Shame = wronged someone, lose face

• Anger = violation, lack of fairness ("defensiveness")

• Hopelessness = powerless to change

• Lonely = unhappiness due to lack of contact

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CORE BELIEFS
Schema/Core beliefs

- Rules for how the world works
- Attempts to categorize experience in order to navigate the world
- Can be positive or maladaptive
- One belief may work well in one setting, but not another
- Associated with developmental/learning experiences and emotion
- Automatic thought = weed; Core belief = root of the weed

Common Maladaptive Schema In Adult ADHD

1. Mistrust
   “I cannot rely on myself.”

2. Failure
   “I have not met expectations.”

3. Incompetence / Dependence
   “I cannot handle life.”

4. Worthless / Inadequacy / Defectiveness / Shame
   “I’m basically a bad/useless person.”

5. Unlovability
   “No one will ever want me.”

Behavioral responses (self-defeating)

- Avoidance – Not facing things
- Procrastination – Maladaptive delay
- Deflection – Doing other things, instead
- Running out the clock – Disengaged
COGNITIVE MODIFICATION OF NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Catching A.T.’s

1. Use changes in your feelings, including discomfort about a task, or the fact you are avoiding a task as signs that you are having negative automatic thoughts.

2. Think back and figure out what situation, task, or event triggered this reaction.

3. What was your thought about or interpretation? (“What thought went through my mind about it? What does this mean to me?”)

4. How does this thought influence your feelings and your behavior?

5. Are you engaging in any thinking errors? How might you look at things differently? (refer to list of Thinking Errors)

Cognitive Distortions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distortions</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overgeneralization*</td>
<td>Mindfulness, Here and now. Examine the evidence. Behavioral experiments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magical thinking (e.g., no meds)*</td>
<td>Behavioral experiments. Psychoeducation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative thinking</td>
<td>Focus on your goals, not others. Downward social comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-or-nothing thinking*</td>
<td>Scaling, thinking in shades of gray. Acceptance of &quot;good enough&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoulds</td>
<td>Who made these rules? Decentering. Acceptance and refocus on goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind reading / Fortune telling</td>
<td>Examine the evidence/projection. Assertiveness, &quot;I can ask what people think and no one can predict the future but I can influence it!&quot; Behavioral experiments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnification / Catastrophization*</td>
<td>Feared fantasy tech. Affect tolerance. Examine the evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maladaptive imagery*</td>
<td>Imagery re-scripting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Changing A.T.’s

1. Recognize your automatic thoughts about a task that affect your follow through.

2. Reconsider these negative thoughts as though they were arguments made against you or the task by a “Prosecuting Attorney” who is presenting a case against you to a Judge and jury.

3. Now, consider how your “Defense Attorney” would object to any thinking errors, incomplete information, and exaggerations in the Prosecutor’s argument and make a case on your behalf focused on a balanced, realistic view of the situation.

Changing A.T.’s (2)

4. Weigh the evidence and consider ways that you can take action using an adaptive view.

5. Use previous Take Away suggestions for getting engaged on a task.

Developing New Thoughts

1. What am I thinking about this situation? Am I using any thinking errors?

2. What is another way to think about this situation? What would my “Defense Attorney” say?

3. What is the worst possible outcome? What is the best possible outcome? What is the most likely outcome in this situation?

4. What are some specific steps I can take to influence this situation? Can I handle the situation?
Developing New Thoughts (2)

5. If a friend of mine (particularly someone with ADHD) was in this situation and had these reactions, how would I advise him or her?

6. In the grand scheme of things, is this situation as bad as I’m making it out to be? How will I look at this situation in an hour? A day? A month? A year from now?

7. What can I do to handle this situation, such that I can look back on it with a sense of satisfaction? What is a small step I can take to make this happen?

Procrastination

- Maladaptive delay of task
- Magnification – Minimization
  - Magnify negatives
  - Minimize positives
- Change ratio
- “Swing votes”
- Define smallest point of engagement
- Tolerate time-limited discomfort for more substantial gains

Motivation

- The ability to generate an emotion about a task in the absence of immediate consequences
- “I don’t feel like doing it and I don’t have to”
- What is the “task”? How long? How get started?
- Think through benefits – “invest” 600 seconds
Pessimism

- View in which undesirable outcomes consistently outweigh potential benefits (i.e., You predict 10 out of the last 3 rainy days.)
- Usually results in both negative anticipations AND after-the-fact regrets.
- May be rooted in past ADHD experiences (“Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me”)

Pessimism (2)

- Make informed choice about tasks, endeavors (“good fit,” salience, importance)
- Specific strategies for handling specific situations. Identify your old behavioral script
- Suspend your doubts. Develop your new behavioral script. Identify things you are doing differently.
- “Do the experiment.” Gain new experiences.

Discounting Tasks (or coping skills)

- “Rationalization” – Making seemingly logical decisions that are the opposite of your goals and intentions (“making excuses”)
- Convincing yourself to procrastinate – and making it (seemingly) justifiable.
Discounting Tasks (2)

• “I’ll do X and then I’ll be in the mood…”
• “One more won’t be bad…”
• “I’ll wake up early tomorrow morning…”
• “I’ll have time during the day tomorrow…”
• “I’ll pull an all-nighter. That is when I work best.”
• “I need this now”
• “I’ll worry about that later…”
• “It will all work out, somehow…”
• “I know I’m procrastinating, but…”
• “It’s too late to do anything about this now.”

Discounting Tasks (3)

• “I don’t need a daily planner. I should be able to do it on my own.”
• “I’ve tried using a daily planner (or other tool) and it doesn’t work.”
• “I’ll look stupid doing this. No one else has to do this.”
• “This is moving too slowly. I’ll never get where I want to be.”
• “I’m back at square one. There’s no use.” (after one slip up)
• “I’m a night person/good multi tasker/a person who can hyper-focus.” (Mount Rushmore)

Discounting Tasks (4)

[Managing Discomfort]

• Taming Your Inner “UGH!”
• Thoughts about feelings
• Acknowledge – Accept – Commit
• “I can feel this way AND continue on.”
• Implementation plan for next few moments
Impulsivity

• “I cannot control myself.”
• Identify risk factors.
• Make informed decisions about situations.
• Make preparations for difficult settings.
• Practice in daily life. Be better (not perfect).
• Harm reduction after-the-fact

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CHANGING CORE BELIEFS

Different levels of belief change

• Reconstruction of beliefs (change the rules and the need for them)
• Modification of beliefs (amend the rules to include exceptions)
• Reinterpreting beliefs (consider extenuating factors in your current circumstances when interpreting rules)
• Camouflage beliefs (Cope better when life does not follow the rules – “fake it until you make it”)

Freeman (1993). In K. Kuehlwein & Rosen (Eds.), Cognitive therapies in action: Evolving innovative practice (pp. 54-87). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
Components of belief change

- Engagement – gaining new experiences
- Re-examine your RULES: Cognitive modification of barriers to engagement
- Identify old outlook / develop new outlook you want to foster
- New emotional experiences

Components of belief change (2)

- Be patient and persistent and fair with yourself
- Don’t underestimate the power of individual acts and situations to help change your outlook (sometimes the original belief/rule develop from only a few events)
- Positive experiences associated with doing things
- “The best way out is always through...” (Robert Frost)

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