The Relationship between Attachment Pathologies and Depression: Mediating Role of Anger Feeling

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of anger feeling on the relationship between attachment pathologies and depression. Seventy-five depressed patients (45 women, 30 men) participated in the study. Participants were asked to complete Adult Attachment Inventory, Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, and Novaco Anger Scale. The results indicated that the hypothesized model had a good fit with the observed data. The correlations between insecure attachment styles, anger feeling, and depression were significantly positive. Based on the results of path analysis, anger feeling played a significant mediating role on the relationship between attachment insecurity and depression. According to the results of the present study, it can be concluded that insecure attachment styles and anger feeling can predict severity of depression symptoms. Considering attachment pathologies and anger feeling may have an important clinical role in the processes of prevention, diagnosis and treatment of depression.

Keywords: anger, attachment, depression

Introduction

Proximity seeking is considered as a main behavior provoked by stress and distress (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Attachment figure either secure or insecure is a haven that a child is looking for when confronting stresses or becoming distressed. Secure-based attachment style consisting of positive internal working models of self and others provides one with coping and controlling mechanisms including adaptive emotion regulation strategies. Conversely, insecure-based attachment styles with negative internal working models provide one with insufficient coping and controlling strategies including maladaptive emotion regulation strategies. In the latter situation, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973) explains depression based on characteristics of attachment figures in one hand and internal working models in the other hand. Although research (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Clear, et al., 2019; Simon et al., 2019; Spruit, et al., 2020) supported these assumptions, explaining mechanisms in which attachment pathologies may influence mood disorders including depression is rarely known (Clear, et al., 2019; Ribeiro, et

al., 2018). The main objective of the present study was to investigate the mediating role of anger feeling on the relationship between attachment pathologies and depression. It was hypothesized that anger feeling mediates the relationship between attachment pathologies and depression.

Method

Seventy-five depressed patients (45 women [mean age: 33, age range: 18-57, SD: 12.40], 30 men [mean age: 35, age range: 24-65, SD: 11.50]) referred to psychotherapy clinics in Isfahan were included in this study. Following psychiatric evaluations, participants were included in the study if they can fulfill major depressive disorder criteria and having no comorbid disorder especially anxiety disorder as well as serious physical illnesses requiring medication. After the description of the research objectives, time requirements, response confidentiality, and the participants' consent, Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI; Besharat, 2011), Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS: Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), and Novaco Anger Scale (NAS; Novaco, 1994) were performed. In order to control order effects and tiredness in participants, scales were presented in different sequences. Upon completion all participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures

Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI): The AAI is a 15-item inventory validated for the purpose of measuring attachment styles in Iranian populations with three attachment styles including secure, avoidant, and ambivalent on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much), (Besharat, 2011). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .85, .81, and .79 for above three styles, respectively.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS)*:* The DASS (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) consists of 21 items measuring severity of depression, anxiety, and stress on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 (applied to me very much), with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .97, .92 and .95, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .79, .81, .77 and .85 for depression, anxiety, stress, and the total score, respectively.

Novaco Anger Scale (NAS): The NAS (Novaco, 1994) is a 25-item measuring the severity of reactions to provocative events. Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all angry) to 4 (very angry), with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .77 and test-retest reliability of .73 (Moeller et al., 2016). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the NAS was .77.

Results

Table 1 presents mean scores, standard deviations, and zero order correlations for all study variables. Both pathological attachment styles of avoidant and ambivalent revealed a significantly positive correlation with depression.

Table 1. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Zero Order Correlations between Study Variables

Variable	Women(n = 45) M(SD)	Men(n = 30) M(SD)	1	2	3	4
1. Secure Attachment	13.46(4.32)	12.34(3.81)	1			
2. Avoidant Attachment	15.59(4.28)	14.56(4.32)	-.19**	1		
3. Ambivalent Attachment	14.63(3.74)	14.89(4.12)	-.20**	.36**	1	
4. Anger Feeling	75.43(10.13)	79.34(11.41)	-.14**	.41**	.54**	1
5. Depression	16.21(5.41)	15.19(5.32)	-.13*	.46**	.38**	.48**

M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; **p value < .01; * p value < .05

In order to investigate the mediating role of anger feeling on the relationship between attachment pathologies and depression, path analysis was performed. According to the results of path analysis, the coefficients of all paths were significant except secure attachment style. Standardized and unstandardized direct paths coefficients of the hypothesized model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Standardized and unstandardized regression analysis with the mediating role of anger feeling on the relationship between attachment pathologies and depression

Paths	B	β	t
Secure Attachment on Anger Feeling	-.15	-.64**	-3.21
Avoidant Attachment on Anger Feeling	.34	.56**	2.27
Ambivalent Attachment on Anger Feeling	.36	.36**	6.07
Secure Attachment on Depression	.12	.20	-.80
Avoidant Attachment on Depression	.18	.27**	5.20
Ambivalent Attachment on Depression	.20	.19**	5.05
Anger Feeling on Depression	.29	.26**	3.39

Fit indices of the hypothesized model are presented in Table 3. The Chi-square and The Chi-square over degrees-of-freedom (χ^2/df) are statistically significant. The RMSEA value close of .06 is indicative of good fit. The GFI, AGFI, CFI, and NFI values are desirable.

Table 3. Fit indices the mediating role of anger feeling on the relationship between attachment pathologies and depression

X^2	*df*	*p*	df/X^2	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI
.85	1	.79	1.04	.001	.90	1.00	.95	.99

Discussion& Conclusion

The results of the present study revealed that insecure attachment styles had positive correlation with both depression and anger feeling and confirmed the mediating role of ager feeling on the relationship between insecure attachment styles and depression. These findings are in line with the results reported by previous research (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Clear, et al., 2019; Simon, et al., 2019; Spruit, et al., 2020). Negative internal working models of self and others which develop within the context of mother-child relationship can be considered as internal agents providing the grounds for developing depression (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Psychodynamic theories assume depression as aggression towards the self in which identification with the lost loved object is followed by aggression against the internalized part of the object. This mechanism usually causes guilt feelings that prepare one for depression (Clear, et al., 2019; Ribeiro, et al., 2018).

The results of the present study can explain why people express their anger in different ways. Avoiding style of anger expression, in which one tends to avoid from the main source of the anger, can be explained by avoidant attachment style. Approaching style of anger expression, in which one tends to express angry feelings directly towards the assumed source of anger, can be explained by anxious ambivalent attachment style.

The present study has on the cross-sectional design of the study prevents an understanding of the exact nature of the relationships, particularly with respect to directionality

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