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PREVIEW

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**Characteristic symptoms of elderly depressives on selected
measures of depression**

Kongstvedt, Sheryl J., Ph.D.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1990

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300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

PREVIEW

CHARACTERISTIC SYMPTOMS OF ELDERLY DEPRESSIVES
ON SELECTED MEASURES OF DEPRESSION

by

Sheryl J. Kongstvedt

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdepartmental Area of Psychological
and Cultural Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Robert W. Filbeck

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1990

DISSERTATION TITLE


Characteristic Symptoms of Elderly Depressives on Selected

Measures of Depression

BY

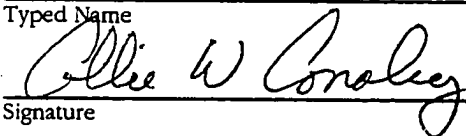
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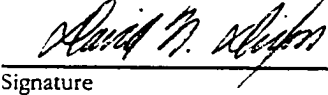
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GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

CHARACTERISTIC SYMPTOMS OF ELDERLY DEPRESSIVES
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Sheryl J. Kongstvedt, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1990

Advisor: Robert W. Filbeck

This research investigated depressive symptoms in the elderly in order to improve diagnostic accuracy among these patients. Select self-assessment depression measures were examined for sensitivity and specificity in detecting depression in the elderly. In addition, this research examined whether geriatric depression differs from depression in younger adults, and whether there are subtypes of depression in the elderly, based on age of onset of first depressive episode (early vs. late onset).

Eighty subjects in two age groups (younger-adult aged 20-40 and geriatric aged 60 and older) participated in the study. Depressed subjects were obtained from psychiatric facilities in the Pittsburgh, PA area. Controls were obtained from senior citizens centers and elderly volunteers.

All subjects were given the Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia (SADS), a structured diagnostic interview, and received a psychiatric diagnosis based on this interview. They also completed three self-assessment measures. These were the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), and the Symptom Check

List-90-R (SCL-90-R), with specific focus on the somatization subscale.

Results supported the hypothesis that geriatric depressives endorse fewer and milder depressive symptoms than do younger-adult depressives. Results did not support the often discussed phenomena that elderly depressives are more somatic in their presentation of depression. In fact there was a nonsignificant tendency for the younger depressed to endorse more somatic symptoms than the elderly.

Results also supported the hypothesis that late-onset geriatric depression can be distinguished from early-onset geriatric depression, based on self-report depressive symptoms. Late-onset depressives endorsed the fewest and mildest of all the depressive groups. Results did not support the hypothesis that late-onset depressives would endorse more somatic complaints.

Geriatric depressives in general, and late-onset geriatric depressed in particular, fell in the "mildly" depressed range on both depression measures. It is suggested that these measures be used as screening tools in primary care facilities, using lower, rather than more stringent cutoffs.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	x
 CHAPTER	
1 Introduction	1
Purpose	3
2 Literature Review.	5
Theories of Depression.	5
Cognitive-Behavioral Theory of Depression.	6
Cognitive Theory.	6
Behavioral Theory	7
Learned Helplessness.	7
Psychoanalytic Theory of Depression. . .	8
Biochemical Theory of Depression	9
Summary of Theories of Depression	9
Diagnosis of depression in the Elderly. . .	10
Atypical presentation of depression	12
Age of Onset.	15
Conclusion and rationale.	16
Research Questions	17
Hypotheses	18
3 Methodology.	20
Subjects.	20

	Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	22
	Assessment Measures	22
	Geriatric Depression Scale	23
	Beck Depression Inventory.	24
	Symptom Checklist-90-Revised	25
	Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia.	26
	Procedure	28
	Data Analysis	29
4	Results.	31
	Sociodemographic differences.	31
	Controls vs. depressed elderly	31
	Younger vs. older depressed.	31
	Summary of sociodemographic variables.	38
	Psychological measures.	38
	Depression scales	43
	Control vs. depressed	49
	Younger vs. older depressed	51
	Item analysis.	53
	Summary of younger vs. older	55
	Early vs. late-onset geriatric depressed.	55
	Item analysis.	56
5	Discussion.	61
	Self-assessment measures.	61
	Beck Depression Inventory.	61
	Geriatric Depression Scale	62

Overview of depression scales.	63
SCL-90-R Somatization Scale.	63
Geriatric Depressed	64
Geriatric vs. younger depressed.	64
Late vs. early onset	65
Summary of geriatric depressed	66
Limitations and Implications for	
Future Research and Practice	67
Conclusion.	70
REFERENCES.	71
APPENDICES	
A Beck Depression Inventory.	81
B Geriatric Depression Scale	85
C Sample of Items on the SCL-90-R	
Somatization Subscale	88
C Informed Consent	90

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Subject Demographic Data	21
2	One-way Analysis of Variance on Education for All Depressed Groups	32
3	Analysis of Covariance for Education and Group on Self-Report Measures for All Depressed Groups	33
4	Two-Way Analysis of Variance (Group X Sex) on the Beck Depression Inventory For All Depressed Groups	35
5	Two-Way Analysis of Variance (Group X Sex) on the Geriatric Depression Scale for All Depressed Groups	36
6	Two-Way Analysis of Variance (Group X Sex) on the Somatization Scale of the SCL-90-R for All Depressed Groups	37
7	Means and Standard Deviations on the Self-Report Measures for All Groups .	39
8	One-way Analysis of Variance and Tukey Post- Hoc Testing Comparing all Groups on Self- Report Measures	42
9	Agreement Between Diagnosis of Depression and Depression Scales at Lower Cutoff . . .	45
10	Agreement Between Diagnosis of Depression and Depression Scales at More Stringent	

	Cutoff	46
11	Sensitivity and Specificity for Depression	
	Scales at Lower Cutoff	47
12	Sensitivity and Specificity for Depression	
	Scales at More Stringent Cutoff	48
13	One-Way Analysis of Variance & Tukey Post-Hoc	
	Testing Comparing Controls with Geriatric	
	Depressed on Self-Report Measures	50
14	One-Way Analysis of Variance & Tukey Post-Hoc	
	Testing Comparing Younger & Geriatric	
	Depressed on Self-Report Measures	52
15	Means and Standard Deviations for	
	Items Differentiating Younger and	
	Geriatric Depressed on the Beck	
	Depression Inventory	54
16	One-Way Analysis of Variance & Tukey Post Hoc	
	Testing Comparing Early and Late-Onset	
	Geriatric Depressed On Self-Report	
	Measures	57
17	Means and Standard Deviations for Items	
	Differentiating Early vs. Late-Onset	
	Geriatric Depressed on the Beck	
	Depression Inventory (BDI)	58

18	Means and Standard Deviations for Items Differentiating Early vs. Late-Onset Geriatric Depressed on the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS)	59
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PREVIEW

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1 Means of BDI and GDS for All Groups	40
2 Means of Somatization Scale for All Groups. . . .	41

PREVIEW

Characteristic Symptoms of Elderly Depressives
on Selected Measures of Depression

CHAPTER 1

Persons over the age of 65 constitute approximately 17% of the population and nearly 1/3 of these 24 million individuals are believed to have psychiatric problems severe enough for professional attention (Fry, 1986; Gerner, 1979). Yet, professional training and understanding of the aged and the aging process continue to lag behind.

Affective disorders are believed to account for nearly 50% of the admissions of older adults to acute psychiatric hospitals in the U.S. (Gurland & Cross, 1982) and a significant proportion of these cases are believed to be first admissions (Fry, 1986). Community surveys have reported depressive symptoms in as many as 27-65% of persons over 60 (Blazer, Hughes & George, 1987; Raymond, Michals & Steer, 1980). Approximately 1-6% of those reporting depressive symptoms were believed to meet the criteria for major depressive disorder, as defined by DSM III.

Age itself may affect both the pattern of depressive symptoms and the elderly's susceptibility to depression (Fry, 1986). Older depressives report feeling "depressed" to a lesser degree than do the younger depressives. They tend to exhibit more physical symptoms and complaints,

express less guilt, are more apathetic, and display more paranoia, suspiciousness, and irritability (Gerner, 1979). Although frequency of depression is generally reported to be higher in women than men in the younger population, this trend may be reversed in persons over 80 (Gurland, Dean, Cross, & Golden, 1980). Depression in the elderly typically does not remit in a spontaneous manner, as is often the case with depressive symptoms in the young, and tends to worsen over time, becoming increasingly resistant to treatment (Hussian, 1981).

Depressive episodes in the elderly may be triggered by social concerns and losses, i.e. decline in health, alteration in cognitive functioning, loss or change in employment, and less mobility and independence. These changes often result in another loss, that of self esteem, with consequent depression becoming severe enough to precipitate suicide (Hussian, 1981; Salzman & Shader, 1978). The number of successful suicide attempts in the elderly greatly outnumber those for younger adults, and is especially high for elderly white divorced males (Salzman & Shader, 1978). Individuals over 65 account for approximately 25% of all suicides (Goff & Jenike, 1986) and a preoccupation with somatic symptoms has been associated with increased suicide potential in the elderly (DeAlarcon, 1964).

The aging process is often conceptualized as a gradual

downward trend with increasing levels of inadequacy, impairment, and physical and psychological decline. This has led to widespread myths and misconceptions regarding the utility and feasibility of assessing and treating psychiatric problems in the elderly (Fry, 1986).

Although depression is widespread among the elderly, it often goes unrecognized, misdiagnosed, and mistreated. Psychiatric diagnoses are frequently ignored in the clinical assessment of the elderly, with insufficient time spent in differentiating between relatively mild and benign changes of normal aging and the severe disruptions of function (Fry, 1986). Often complaints of increasingly poor health are attributed to "old age" and may therefore be ignored, especially when medical exams turn up negative. The diagnosis of depression in the elderly warrants increased attention and careful consideration.

Purpose

As the life expectancy of the population increases, it can be expected that elderly individuals will utilize an ever larger proportion of health care resources. The accurate assessment of geriatric depression and recognition of subtypes have important implications for all medical and psychiatric practitioners.

The present study will contribute to the understanding of the assessment of geriatric depression, and will provide guidelines based on empirical data for the uses and

limitations of the most commonly administered depression screening tests in practice today. The importance of improving diagnostic accuracy in this population is critical. Failure to recognize early depression in the elderly may lead to prolonged depression, unnecessary medical procedures, and possibly suicide.

The purpose of the present study is to provide additional information about the phenomenon of depression among the elderly as a basis for identification. More specifically, this study will investigate:

(1) whether selected self-report measures of depression, which can be administered and interpreted by minimally trained medical personnel, yield results that agree with results from a longer structured clinical interview requiring trained professionals for administration and interpretation,

(2) whether depression in the elderly can be differentiated from depression in younger adults, based on endorsement of depressive symptoms,

(3) whether examination of responses to self-report instruments will reveal unique aspects of depression in the elderly, and

(4) whether age of onset of first depressive episode can differentiate patterns on the self-report measures.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of Depression

Everyone experiences some degree of sadness, but normal unhappiness is distinguishable from major depression. No single definition of depression could include all the various findings and theoretical frameworks which appear in the literature. However, there does appear to be widespread agreement as to the "classic" symptoms and manifestations of depression.

The following features were abstracted from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Revised (DSM-III-R) (1987), and from the Research Diagnostic Criteria (RDC) (Spitzer, Endicott, & Robins, 1978), and define an episode of clinical depression for both older and younger persons.

1. Depressive symptoms have been present for two or more weeks and represent a change from earlier functioning. The patient must report feeling either depressed or a loss of interest and pleasure.

2. At least five symptoms from the following must have been present, nearly every day, as indicated by either subjective account or observation by others: depressed mood; diminished interest or pleasure in all or many activities (anhedonia); significant weight loss or gain, when not dieting, including a change in appetite; insomnia

or hypersomnia; psychomotor agitation or retardation; fatigue or loss of energy; feelings of worthlessness and/or guilt; diminished ability to think or concentrate; and recurrent suicidal ideation, or thoughts of death.

3. No organic factors initiating or maintaining the disturbance were established.

4. The symptoms were not a normal reaction of grief (i.e. loss of a loved one).

5. No delusions or hallucinations were present for 2 weeks or longer, without accompanying mood disturbance.

6. The symptoms were not superimposed on schizophrenia or any other psychotic disorder.

The RDC specifies that the individual also show evidence of functional impairment, or be taking medication or receiving treatment for the depressive symptoms.

The following represents a broad spectrum of theoretical approaches to depressive phenomena.

Cognitive-Behavior Theory of Depression

Cognitive Theory. Theorists such as Aaron Beck (1967) assign primary causal significance to cognitive processes. In this view, depression is often a result of distorted perceptions and faulty cognitive formulations. Beck (1967) views depression as the result of an individual's negative perception of self. Treatment consists of altering these negative/distorted self perceptions with more positive/appropriate ones.

Cognitive theory has given rise to the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961). This Inventory is commonly used to screen for depression, with a wide range of individual clients or patients.

Behavioral Theory. For the behavioral theorists, environmental rewards shape both affect and behavior. Depressed feelings are presumed to be the consequence of a low rate of reinforcement, or a loss of potential reinforcers (Lewinsohn, 1986).

Charles Ferster, one of the earliest researchers to apply the behavioral framework to depression, found depressed individuals were passive and uninvolved with their environment (Wetzel, 1984). Depressives experience few daily activities as pleasurable or satisfying.

Behavioral treatment is devoted to increasing the frequency and diversity of positive reinforcers (including social and situational). To help select potential reinforcers, the Pleasant Events Schedule (MacPhillamy & Lewinsohn, 1971) was developed.

Learned Helplessness. Learned helplessness provides a model for understanding reactive depression or depression that is caused by environmental rather than internal events (Miller, Rosellini, & Seligman, 1986). Initially based upon animal research, a learned helplessness framework states that when an organism finds that its responses will not affect outcome (elicit a reinforcer), then the