

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND ASSERTIVENESS
IN EGYPTIAN SOCIETY ***

Abstract

Review of the literature demonstrates the inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness in depressed subjects from the American society. This study shows that although this kind of relationship between depression and assertiveness can be found in the general population of the Egyptian society, it does not exist in depressed subjects in this society. Moreover, the study demonstrates agreement with similar ones in America, in regard to the more significant relationship between depression and assertiveness in female than in male subjects. Two measures were translated from English to Arabic, and scientific methods were used to validate the translation process. The two measures were standardized on an Egyptian population. The study shows that assertiveness or social skills do not have the same value in the Egyptian society as they have in the American one as precipitating factors for depression.

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Introduction

The inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness has been demonstrated by many studies in the American society, that means individuals who are depressed show a low level of assertive behavior. Depending on this outcome, many workers in the field of counseling and psychotherapy have been establishing programs aiming to alleviate the level of depression by increasing the patient's level of assertive behavior.

The number of successful studies in this attempt has drawn the attention of this writer. Hoping to use the same approach in his home country-Egypt -in dealing with depressed persons, the present investigator's main goal is to study the kind of relationship between depression and assertiveness in Egyptian depressed subjects as a prerequisite to using the approach of increasing the patient's level of assertiveness as a way of alleviating their level of depression.

In the light of the cultural, educational, religious, social, economical, and most important, political differences between the American and Egyptian societies, and also on the basis of studies which deal with sub-cultural

differences in the American society (Cheek, 1976, Becker , 1974) , the present investigator rejects the hypothesis that there is a negative relationship between depression and assertiveness in Egyptian depressed subjects. However, this investigator agrees with the writers on assertiveness (Salter, 1961; Wolpe-Lazarus, 1967; Cotler; 1976; and Albert & Emmons, 1978) who believe that, as a general rule, there is a negative relationship between depression and assertiveness. Also, he agrees with Lea and Paquin, 1981, on their notion that the relationship between depression and assertiveness is more significant in female than in male subjects.

The research hypotheses

There are three major hypotheses in this research, they are as follows:

- 1- In general, there is an inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness in an Egyptian population.
- 2- The inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness is more significant in the Egyptian female than in the Egyptian male subjects.

- 3- There is no significant relationship between depression and assertiveness in the Egyptian depressed subjects.

Review of the literature

The demonstration of the inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness takes two directions. The first is the direct way, by studying this relationship in a group of subjects, using measures for both depression and assertiveness, and finding out the correlation between the subjects' scores on the two measures. The first study by Borovay falls in this category. The second is the indirect way, by means of implementing an assertion training program for depressed subjects and finding out its effect on the subjects' level of depression. The majority of studies, those by Hayman, Fagan, Sanchez, Sanchez & Lewinsohn, and Lea & Paquin, fall in this category.

In 1977, Borovay studied the relationship among depression, locus of control, and assertive behavior in freshmen college women. From studying 43 women, she found that the non-assertive women exhibited a higher level of depression.

Hayman, 1978, studied the effects of assertion training on depression for 26 moderately depressed females. He found a strong negative relationship between assertiveness and depression.

Fagan, 1979, compared group psychotherapy and group assertion training in treating depression. From studying 19 adolescent females, he found that the results favored the assertion training group. He emphasizes the probability of the existence of different types of depression which lend themselves positively to assertion training.

Sanchez, 1979, studied the effectiveness of group assertion training in comparison to a more traditional insight-oriented group therapy in the treatment of depressed persons. He studied 32 outpatients and concluded that his data supported the hypothesis that assertion training would be the most effective of the two treatments tested. Sanchez also mentions that his study not only reveals a strong relationship between depression and assertiveness but also provides support for the notion that a low level of assertive skill likely functions as one of the precipitating factors in the development of depression.

In 1980, Sanchez and Lewinsohn studied 12 moderately to severely depressed subjects. Their results suggest that there is an inverse relation between assertive behavior and depression. Also, these results suggest that the rate of emitted assertive behavior may be able to predict the subsequent level of depression. They believe that therapeutic interventions that increase level of emitted assertive behavior may prove useful in the treatment of depression.

Lea and Paquin, 1981, studied assertiveness and clinical depression. Their study included 26 depressed subjects, and 36 subjects served as a control group. The results indicated that there is a clear inverse relationship between assertiveness and depression. Lea and Paquin also mention the probability that the relationship between assertiveness and depression exists only for females and does not exist for males.

Methodology : Subjects and Tools

The research sample includes 140 Egyptian subjects, 82 females and 58 males. Seventy five of the subjects are married, 64 are single, and one is widowed. The age range

is from 20-55 years. The subjects cover all levels of education : 6 are Elementary level, one subject is Middle school level, 92 are High school level , and 41 are University level, as shown in Table 1 .University specialities are 13 Accounting, 10 Commercial, 7 Engineering, 4 Social Workers, 2 Law , 2 Arts, 2 Economy, and one Physician, as shown in Table 2 . All subjects participated on a voluntary basis.

TABLE 1
Sex, Social Status and Educational Level of 140
Egyptian Subjects

	sex	Social Status			Educational Level			
		Married	Single	Widowed	Elementary	Middle	High	University
Male	58	36	21	1	4	-	61	18
Fmale	82	39	43	-	2	1	31	23
Total	140	75	64	1	6	1	92	41

TABLE 2
The University Speciality of 41 Egyptian
Subjects

University Specia .	#	University Specia.	#	University Specia.	#
Accounting	13	Social Worker	4	Economy	2
Commercial	10	Law	2	Physician	1
Engineering	7	Arts	2	Total	41

Tools

Four measures were used in this investigation : General Information Form, which was designed by the investigator in Arabic, the Wolpe-Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory, the Beck Depression Inventory and the Depression Scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory.

Procedures

- A- The Wolpe-Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory and the Beck Depression Inventory were translated by this investigator from English to Arabic.
- B- The Back-Translation method for cross cultural translation was used for the validation of the measures' translation (Brislin, 1970). Then, the research measures were standardized on 35 Egyptian subjects.
- c- The research tools were administered to the research subjects in the following order : General Information Form, The Wolpe-Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory and the Beck Depression Inventory.

Results

The research results are divided into two sections. The first concerns the standardization process of the Wolpe-Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory and the Beck Depression

Inventory on an Egyptian population. The second concerns the research hypotheses.

In regard to the standardization process, this research demonstrates the reliability and validity of the Wolpe-Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory and the Beck Depression Inventory for the Egyptian population. For both measures, the Test-Retest method was used to demonstrate their reliability.

A group of 33 Egyptian subjects was tested and then retested on both inventories. The period between the first and the second test was a month and half. The reliability coefficient for the Wolpe-Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory is 0.84 ($p < 0.005$). The reliability coefficient for the Beck Depression Inventory is 0.77 ($p < 0.005$).

Also, the Split-Half reliability method was used to demonstrate the Beck Depression Inventory. A group of 50 subjects was selected for this purpose. The correlation coefficient between the odd and the even categories was 0.77 ; with a Spearman-Brown correlation formula this coefficient rose to 0.87 ($p < 0.005$).

In regard to the inventories' validity for Egyptian population, this investigator used the Construct Validity method with the Beck Depression Inventory, and the Criterion- Related Validity method with the Wolpe - Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory.

A group of 43 subjects was tested on the Beck Depression Inventory and on the Depression Scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. The correlation between the scores on the depression scales is 0.60($p < 0.005$).

The Criterion-Related Validity method was used with the Wolpe-Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory by obtaining the correlation between scores on the inventory for a group of 30 subjects and the rating of their assertive behavior done by three judges. The correlation between the subjects' scores in the Wolpe -Lazarus Inventory and the mean scores obtained by the three judges was considered a Criterion-Related Validity of the inventory. It was found to be 0.87 ($p < 0.005$).

Regarding the results concerning the research hypotheses, the following was found. **The First hypothesis**

: In general, there is an inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness in an Egyptian population.

A correlation coefficient of- 0.41 was found between depression and assertiveness using the research sample (N :140). This coefficient is significant ($p < 0.005$). Therefore, the first hypothesis is confirmed.

The Second hypothesis : The inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness is more significant in the Egyptian female than in the Egyptian male.

A correlation coefficient of- 0.36 was found between depression and assertiveness in the Egyptian female subjects (N = 82) this coefficient is significant ($p < 0.005$). And a correlation coefficient of - 0.26 was found between depression and assertiveness in the Egyptian male subjects (N = 58) this coefficient is significant ($p < 0.025$). That means the inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness is more significant in the Egyptian female subjects than in the Egyptian male subjects, and the second hypothesis is confirmed.

The Third hypothesis : There is no significant relationship between depression and assertiveness in the Egyptian depressed subjects.

The depressed subject in this research is the person who has a score higher than the total of the mean score of the whole research sample on the Beck Depression Inventory plus one standard deviation. The mean score of the whole sample on the Beck Depression Inventory is 14.36 ; the standard deviation is 8.72, as shown in Table 3. The depressed subject in this research is the person whose score on the Beck Depression Inventory exceeded 23. Twenty-three subjects were found to be depressed ; 17 female, and 6 male.

Regarding the results concerning the third hypothesis, a correlation coefficient of - 0.13 was found between depression and assertiveness in Egyptian depressed subjects (N = 23) . This coefficient is not significant. Moreover, a correlation coefficient of - 0.027 was found between depression and assertiveness in Egyptian female depressed subjects (N = 17). This coefficient is not significant. Also, a correlation coefficient of - 0.081 was found between depression and assertiveness in Egyptian

male depressed subjects (N= 6). This coefficient is not significant. The three mentioned correlation coefficients demonstrate that there is no significant relationship between depression and assertiveness in Egyptian depressed subjects, and that the third hypothesis is confirmed.

Discussion:

The results of this investigation demonstrate the validity and reliability of both the Wolpe- Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory and the Beck Depression Inventory for an Egyptian population. In addition, this investigation confirms its hypotheses.

TABLE 3
Means and Standard Deviations on Beck Depression Inventory and Wolpe-Lazarus Assertiveness Inventory of 140 Egyptian Subjects.

Sex	#	Means of BDI	S.D.of BDI	Means of W-LAI	S.D. of W-LAI
Male	58	11.72	7.64	22.48	3.58
Female	82	15.95	9.42	19.17	4.44
Total	140	14.36	8.72	23.69	4.27

It shows that, in general there is an inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness in an Egyptian population. Also, the results agree with similar

ones in American society in regard to the greater significance of this relationship in female than in male subjects. Finally, this investigation confirms the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between depression and assertiveness in Egyptian depressed subjects.

The confirmation of the first hypothesis agrees with all the literature written on assertiveness; all writers on assertiveness believe that the assertive person has little chance to be afflicted with depression, and vice versa (Salter, 1961; Wolpe-Lazarus; 1976; Wolpe; 1973; Cotler; 1976, and Alberti & Emmons, 1978).

The confirmation of the second hypothesis agrees with both common sense and the previous studies. We grow up perceiving males as active and females as passive, and both sexes are raised to believe in this perception and behave accordingly. This has led some writers, such as Lea and Paquin, 1981, to believe that the inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness exists only for females, and does not exist for males.

The confirmation of the third hypothesis counters the majority of the studies that have been done in the American

society. The bulk of the studies in the American society confirms the inverse relationship between depression and assertiveness in depressed subjects.

This investigation raises many questions. First, if the non-assertive behavior proved not to be the major precipitating factor for depression to occur in Egypt, what then are the kinds of precipitating factors for depression in this society? Second, do the results of this investigation indicate that assertion training should not be used with Egyptian depressed subjects? Third, how does it come about that depressed persons are not receiving any kind of psychological services, continue going to their work, and are expected to do their duties? Fourth, if we propose that this investigation's sample is representative of Egyptian society, would that mean more than 16 percent of the Egyptian population is depressed?

Regarding the first question which concerns the precipitating factors for depression in Egypt, this investigator suggests that depression in the Egyptian society, as in many other developed countries, could be best explained on the basis of the behavior theories of

depression by its emphasis on the environment's role in the occurrence of depression.

This investigator proposes that the shortage of reinforcements in the Egyptian society is one of the precipitating factors for depression in this society. This proposition is based on Lewinsohn assumption about the number of potentially reinforcing events which can be provided by the environment as a precipitating factor in depression (Lewinsohn, 1974, p.158; 1975, p. 30)

We can state how the shortage of reinforcements explains depression in Egyptian society, and how this shortage of reinforcements in this society leads to the independence of assertive behavior of depression in depressed subjects in Egypt.

In contrast to the American society, people in Egypt grow up with few reinforcements. To achieve a reinforcement, the person is required to do his best, to employ all his talents, to learn all successful behaviors leading to this reinforcement. But because the potentially reinforcing events which the Egyptian environment can provide are few, only few persons obtain these reinforcements, and the remaining individuals are required

to continue their best efforts with little hope of achieving their reinforcements. As a result, although the individuals have reached a reasonable degree of assertiveness or social skills in their efforts to gain their reinforcements, they fall victims to depression because not enough reinforcements are available in the environment. And the effect of assertiveness or social skills on depression in Egypt is neutralized.

The theoretical ground for this assumption can be found also in Ferster's hypothesis (1974, pp. 35-36) related to schedules of reinforcement as factors in causing depression. He says:

The schedule of reinforcement of performance is an important determinant of that performance's frequency, independently of the kind of reinforcer or the associated deprivation. In general, reinforcement schedules requiring large amounts of behavior to produce the relevant change in the environment, are those most susceptible to loss. the critical factor is a fixed and large amount of activity required for each reinforcement.

Regarding the second question concerning the value of using assertion training programs with Egyptian depressed subjects whose depression proved not to be related to assertiveness, this investigator agrees with Wolpe, 1979, p. 562, on the possibility of using these

procedures as an initial step in therapy sessions. However, two cautions must be kept in mind. The first is the degree of relying on assertion training per se depends on the nature of the problem we encounter and on the type of person we deal with in the therapy session. The second is based on Alberti and Emmons' emphasis on the importance of taking cultural context into account when dealing with assertive behavior (Alberti & Emmons, 1978, p. 13).

We must keep in mind the differences between the American society and the Egyptian one in regard to the degree of political freedom, the nature of the relationship between parents and their youngsters, between husbands and wives, between brothers and sisters, and between employees and their employers. All these factors have to be kept in mind when talking about or employing assertion training programs with subjects from Egypt or any developed countries.

In regard to the third and fourth question concerned with the psychological services in Egypt and the high percentage of depressed persons in this society, we believe that blame ought to be directed to the psychiatric professionals in Egypt. They insist on not having competition from the other

psychological professionals. We believe that unless all psychological professionals have the chance to alleviate their fellow human beings sufferings, psychological services in Egypt will not improve.

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