



Sense of coherence as a mediator between personality and depression



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to test the usefulness of the new facet-version questionnaire of the Zuckerman Alternative Five Factor Model (Zuckerman-Kuhlman-Aluja Personality Questionnaire) in examining the associations between personality, depression and sense of coherence (SOC) in a university student sample. All five of the personality factors were found to be at least partially related to both SOC and depression. In particular, lower neuroticism, sensation seeking and hostility, along with higher extraversion and activity, were all significantly associated with SOC. On the other hand, lower sensation seeking, extraversion and activity, and higher levels of aggression and neuroticism, were associated with higher depression scores, either directly or indirectly through SOC. The results of this study demonstrate the usefulness and validity of the ZKA-PQ personality assessment measure for examining correlates of both SOC and depression.

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1. Introduction

The concept of ‘Sense of coherence’ (SOC) is attributed to Antonovsky (1993), who proposed that highly coherent individuals are more able to comprehend and manage life events in a meaningful way. Antonovsky (1993) considered sense of coherence as a personality trait that constitutes a psychologically based stress-resistance resource.

As regards to the three SOC components, comprehensibility refers to the degree to which individuals perceive information about themselves and others as structured, ordered, understandable, predictable and clear (Antonovsky, 1993; Herbst, 2007; Hittner, 2007). Manageability refers to the self-perception that one has the internal and external resources necessary to cope with life's demands (Strang & Strang, 2001), so that life does not become unmanageable and overwhelming (Herbst, 2007). Meaningfulness refers to the belief that life goals and commitments are worthy of personal investment (Hittner, 2007).

1.1. Sense of coherence & personality

Numerous recent studies have been published on the connection between SOC and the five-factor model of personality with a consensus on

the inverse relation of SOC to neuroticism (Feldt, Metsäpelto, Kinnunen, & Pulkkinen, 2007; Grevenstein & Bluemke, 2015) and on its positive relation to emotional stability (Hochwälder, 2012).

Besides low levels of neuroticism, high levels of agreeableness, extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness also are associated with high levels of SOC (Coetzee, 2003; Harrington & Loffredo, 2001; Hayes & Joseph, 2003). However, Feldt et al. (2007) pointed out that the strength of these associations are modest in magnitude.

There also have been studies examining the association between SOC and aspects of the alternative five-factor model of personality. Hutchinson, Stuart, and Pretorius (2010) found a negative correlation with neuroticism-anxiety (−0.46) and aggression-hostility (−0.22), and positive, but weaker correlations with activity (0.18) and sociability (0.08). Similar results were found by Próchniak (2014) who examined policemen: SOC was negatively related to neuroticism (−0.58) and aggression/hostility (−0.32), and positively, but weakly related to sociability (0.18) and activity (0.17). Impulsive sensation seeking, however, was not related to SOC.

1.2. Sense of coherence & depression

Sense of coherence was found to be a significant predictor of depression (Carstens & Spangenberg, 1997; Hittner & Swickert, 2010; Sairenchi et al., 2011). Depression was mostly related to lack of meaningfulness in a comparison of 50 patients diagnosed with major

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depressive disorder and 50 control subjects (Carstens & Spangenberg, 1997). In a study of depressive symptoms in a non-clinical sample, Hittner and Swickert (2010) found that manageability and meaningfulness evidenced similar levels of predictive power, with both SOC components having higher discriminative power than comprehensibility. Other studies have shown that SOC might be a protective factor for depression among non-official caregivers (Chumbler, Rittman, & Wu, 2008) and nurses (Tselebis, Moulou, & Ilias, 2001) by decreasing vulnerability, or increasing resiliency.

1.3. Personality & depression

A meta-analysis of the five-factor model of personality and mood disorders (Kotov, Gamez, Schmidt, & Watson, 2010) revealed that individuals with major depressive disorder scored higher (with at least a moderate effect size) in neuroticism and lower in extraversion and conscientiousness than controls. The relation of depression to the alternative five-factor model of personality has also been examined. In a longitudinal study (Giannoni-Pastor et al., 2015) depressive symptoms correlated with Neuroticism-Anxiety and Aggression-Hostility but not with Activity, Sociability or Impulsive-Sensation Seeking.

Wang et al. (2002) found that depressive patients scored significantly higher on neuroticism-anxiety and aggression-hostility but lower on activity and sociability. No difference in sensation seeking was found. Xu et al. (2015) examined patients with bipolar disorders (BD I and BD II) and found both groups to score significantly higher than the healthy control group on Impulsive sensation seeking, Neuroticism-anxiety, and Aggression-hostility. Furthermore, depression scores were significantly correlated with Neuroticism-anxiety and General Sensation Seeking.

1.4. Aims of the present study

As discussed in the Introduction, previous studies have found associations between personality, SOC and depression. In an effort to build on previous research, our main aim was to test the usefulness of the new facet-version questionnaire of the Zuckerman Alternative Five Factor Model (Zuckerman-Kuhlman-Aluja Personality Questionnaire, Aluja, Kuhlman, & Zuckerman, 2010) in examining the associations between personality, depression and SOC.

We aimed to build a model that can be related to model of McCrae and Costa (1996) that describes the different levels of individual differences in personality. In this model, basic tendencies (basic personality factors) influence characteristic adaptations (acquired competencies), which influence objective biography (the behavior output of the system, including emotional reactions). Based on this conceptualization, our mediation model aims to test how psychobiologically-based personality factors influence depression (emotional reaction) indirectly through sense of coherence (which is an acquired competency). We hypothesized that SOC would serve as a significant mediator of the association between personality and depression.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Our sample consisted of 461 psychology students, 374 females and 87 males, at Eötvös Loránd University with an average age of 22.00 (SD = 3.34) for females and 21.84 (SD = 2.22) for males. All students completed the Zuckerman-Kuhlman-Aluja Personality Questionnaire and the Sense of Coherence scale. In addition, 262 students also completed a Depression scale.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Zuckerman-Kuhlman-Aluja Personality Questionnaire (ZKA-PQ, Aluja et al., 2010)

The ZKA-PQ is a 200-item personality questionnaire designed to assess an alternative five-factor model, and it was developed and validated in English and Spanish (Castilian) by Aluja et al. (2010). The ZKA-PQ contains five factors with four facets per factor. Each facet is composed of ten items and responses are indicated using a 4-point Likert-scale. We used the Hungarian version that was developed and validated by Surányi and Aluja (2014). Back-translation was checked and accepted by research team of Prof. Zuckerman and Prof. Aluja. Reliabilities were acceptable for the Hungarian sample (Surányi & Aluja, 2014). Cronbach's alphas in the present study were 0.915, 0.940, 0.871, 0.878, and 0.912 for Extraversion (EX), Neuroticism (NE), Activity (AC), Sensation Seeking (SS) and Aggression (AG) respectively. Cronbach's alphas for most of the subscales were higher than 0.7, the exceptions being Experience Seeking (SS2), Boredom Susceptibility/Impulsivity (SS4), Hostility (AG4) and Restlessness (AC3), for which alpha reliabilities were between 0.6 and 0.7.

2.2.2. Short form Sense of Coherence scale (Antonovsky, 1987)

The short form Sense of Coherence scale (Antonovsky, 1987) was administered to all respondents. It consists of 13 items with a 7-point semantic differential scale that measures meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensibility. Based on Antonovsky's (1987) recommendations, we summed the scores of all 13 items as an indicator of overall coherence. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the total score in the present study was 0.822. We used the Hungarian version, which was translated (back-translated) and validated by Balajti, Vokó, Ádány, & Kósa, 2007.

2.2.3. Depression, Anxiety and Stress scale (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

262 participants also completed the 21-item Depression, Anxiety and Stress scale, which measures the emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress. Participants were asked to describe how much each item reflects their emotional states during the past week. Responses are indicated using a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 (applied to me very much). All three subscales demonstrated a high Cronbach's α coefficient: 0.877, 0.788, and 0.840 for depression, anxiety, and stress respectively. However, in this study, we focus only on the Depression scale. The Hungarian translation was prepared by Mariann Szabó, a Hungarian member of the research team of Lovibond, and it is available on home page of DASS (<http://www2.psy.unsw.edu.au/dass/translations.htm>).

2.3. Procedure

Students filled out the questionnaires anonymously during a lecture (90 min). Students received extra credit for participating in the study.

2.4. Statistical analyses

We performed correlation and regression analyses along with mediation analysis. Based on the method proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2008), bootstrapped mediation analyses were performed to test hypotheses regarding the mediating role of sense of coherence in the relationship between personality and depressive symptoms.

Preacher and Hayes (2008) argued that because the sampling distributions of indirect effects are typically skewed, bootstrapping should be applied to determine the confidence intervals of indirect effects. If confidence intervals exclude zero, then inferring the presence of a significant bootstrapped mediation effect is warranted.

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