

People with depression tend to pursue generalised goals

July 8 2013



The study found those with clinical depression were more likely to set abstract goals that were difficult to achieve.

(Medical Xpress)—Researchers from the University of Liverpool have found that people with depression have more generalised personal goals than non-depressed people.

A study conducted by Dr Joanne Dickson, in the University's Institute of Psychology, Health and Society, analysed the lists of personal goals made by people who suffered with depression and those who didn't.

List personal goals

The participants were asked to list goals they would like to achieve at any time in the short, medium or long-term. The goals were categorised for their specificity – for example a global or abstract goal such as, 'to be happy' would represent a general goal, whereas, a goal such as 'improve my 5-mile marathon time this summer' would represent a more specific goal.

Researchers found that whilst both groups generated the same number of goals, people with depression listed goals which were more general and more abstract. The study also found that depressed people were far more likely to give non-specific reasons for achieving and not achieving their goals.

"We found that the goals that people with clinical depression listed lacked a specific focus, making it more difficult to achieve them and therefore creating a downward cycle of negative thoughts"

Having very broad and abstract goals may maintain and exacerbate depression. Goals that are not specific are more ambiguous and, therefore, harder to visualise. If goals are hard to visualise it may result in reduced [expectation](#) of realising them which in turn results in lower [motivation](#) to try and achieve them.

Dr Joanne Dickson said: "We know that depression is associated with negative thoughts and a [tendency](#) to overgeneralise, particularly in reference to how people think about themselves and their past memories."

"This study, for the first time, examined whether this trait also encompasses [personal goals](#). We found that the goals that people with clinical depression listed lacked a specific focus, making it more

difficult to achieve them and therefore creating a downward cycle of [negative thoughts](#).

Help to set specific goals

"These findings could inform the development of effective new ways of treating [clinical depression](#).

"Helping depressed people set specific goals and generate specific reasons for goal achievement may increase their chances of realising them which could break the cycle of negativity which is coupled with depression."

Provided by University of Liverpool

Citation: People with depression tend to pursue generalised goals (2013, July 8) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-07-people-depression-tend-pursue-generalised.html>

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