

Depressed, out of work? Study suggests skills to help land a job

June 15 2016, by Jeff Grabmeier

Unemployed people were more likely to land a job if they used skills commonly taught as part of cognitive therapy for depression, a new study found.

These skills included identifying [negative thoughts](#) and countering them with more positive responses and planning enjoyable activities to improve mood.

This study is the first to show that cognitive behavioral (CB) skills not only predict changes in depression symptoms, but also real-life functioning, said Daniel Strunk, co-author of the study and associate professor of psychology at The Ohio State University.

"Searching for a job is difficult in any circumstance, but it may be even more difficult for [people](#) who are depressed," Strunk said.

"But we found that there are specific skills that can help not only manage the symptoms of depression but also make it more likely that a person will receive a job offer."

Strunk conducted the study with Benjamin Pfeifer, a doctoral student in psychology at Ohio State. Their results appear in the June 2016 issue of the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*.

The study involved 75 unemployed people, aged 20 to 67, who participated in two online surveys taken three months apart.

The participants completed a variety of questionnaires that measured depressive symptoms and a variety of psychological variables, such as dysfunctional attitudes, brooding and a negative cognitive style. They also completed an instrument that measured how often they used CB skills such as countering their own negative thoughts.

About a third of the sample reported symptoms that would put them in the moderately to seriously depressed category, although they were not formally diagnosed. The remaining two-thirds had scores that ranged from mild depression to no symptoms.

The results showed that participants who reported more use of CB skills were more likely to show an improvement in depressive symptoms in the three months between the surveys - and were more likely to report they had received a job offer.

Many of the skills taught by [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) involve rethinking one's negative automatic thoughts, which are maladaptive thoughts that often pop into one's head without effortful reflection. Other skills focus on behavior, like breaking up daunting tasks into smaller parts in order to help a person get started.

"The people who got jobs in our study were more likely to be putting into practice the skills that we try to teach people in [cognitive therapy](#)," Strunk said.

The researchers didn't ask specifically if participants were receiving therapy, but it is likely that few if any of them had received any training in cognitive behavioral therapy, he said.

"Some people just naturally catch themselves when they have negative thoughts and refocus on the positive and use other CB skills. These are the people who were more likely to find a job."

Strunk said most job seekers probably feel some discouragement as they look through job ads and get rejected for [jobs](#). But those who keep persisting and use CB skills to boost their mood were the ones who were most likely to succeed.

"Rejection is so much a part of the process of job seeking. Using cognitive behavioral skills are an important way one can deal with that."

The other variables that the researchers studied, such as dysfunctional attitudes and negative cognitive style, did not predict improvement in [depressive symptoms](#) or higher odds of receiving a job offer. Strunk said this was surprising, but it will take further research to figure out why.

But the results do offer a way for job seekers - especially those who are depressed - to improve their chances of finding work.

"Using cognitive behavioral [skills](#), people can overcome some of the negative thinking that may be holding them back and making it less likely to succeed in their job search," Strunk said.

Provided by The Ohio State University

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