

## **The Relationship between Young Korean Adults' Depressive Symptoms and Patterns of Interest**

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### **Abstract**

*Mental health issues related to depression and individual's patterns of interest impact development. This study is to identify patterns of interest and their effects on depressive symptoms in young adults. This cross-sectional study involved 40 participants. The participants were assessed for depressive symptoms, patterns of interest in daily life, and social participation. The depressive symptoms and patterns of interest were assessed by a well-trained interviewer using a face-to-face method. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and logistic regression analysis were implemented using SPSS 22.0. In terms of depressive symptoms, 32.5% of participants reported no depression, while 67.5% were depressed. When comparing interest patterns from the past, present, and future, the degree of depression was significantly correlated with interests in the past ( $p < .05$ ). The effect of patterns of interest on depressive symptoms was not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). Participation in a variety of activities can help prevent depressive symptoms. Participation in activities of interest can, therefore, be of great help during middle- and late-adult development.*

**Keywords:** *Depression, Interest, Mental health, Young adult.*

### **1. Introduction**

Depression that starts in young adulthood can later cause physical and mental health problems. As the developmental challenges of identity formation take place in this period, young adult acquire health perspective that may reinforce or threaten their health throughout this stage, thereby laying the foundation for health in adulthood under the influence of parents, friends, and society [1]. In young adulthood, problems such as poor academic performance, drinking, stress from school or family problems, lack of emotional support, urges to run away, and depression tend to a problem [2]. Furthermore, in one's 20s, lack of impulse control, uncertainty about the future, academic, financial and relationship problems are common [3, 4].

For that reason, life stressors and factors influencing depressive symptoms will differ. A period adulthood requires continued occupation development, caring own family and parents, and preparing for retirement. As the population ages, the elderly should be prepared for the change of the physical and physiological and adjusted accordingly [5, 6]. Depressive symptoms range from mild to abnormal. Because individuals with depressive symptoms have a damaging self-imagery and face harmful thoughts about their future, increased

levels of depressive symptoms often link to lack of sleep, fatigue, inadequacy, decreased self-esteem, poor attention, anxiety, death, or suicidal ideation [7].

The previous research examining the connection between interests and mental health focuses on adults, most of them have already completed their education. Increasingly, though, researchers have started to recognize the meaning of studying the interests and mental health of adolescents and young adults. Much of this study supports the hypothesis that mental health problems experienced in the early years of life negatively affect adulthood [8]. This study focuses on mental health problems with depressive symptoms and patterns of interest; this type of depression should be handled in the early developmental stages of life in order to positively affect future development.

Interest is described as a choice one makes in terms of likes, dislikes, and indifferences. Previous studies have suggested that an interest is a feeling that is pleasurable, as well as an aspect of personality. Interest has been defined as an effortless and automatic response to any action, observation, or thought [9]. Kielhofner (1985) described interest as an inclination to make occupations enjoyable. Evoking or sustaining interest enhances the chances of improving an individual's mental and physical health statuses. Furthermore, interests facilitate active participation in satisfying occupational activities [10]. Patterns of interest change according to developmental stage, and individuals must participate actively and continuously.

Although it remains somewhat unclear whether depressive symptoms and patterns of interest in young adulthood affect status achievement, the literature suggests that depressive symptoms have a powerful effect on adult health [11, 12]. If depressed young adults complete fewer years of education, problems associated with low interest in everyday life can increase the possibility of mental and physical health problems in adulthood. This study was to examine patterns of interest and their effects on depressive symptoms in young adults. We aimed to provide a guide for future mental health management of young adults.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Research design**

This cross-sectional, analytic study was designed to investigate the correlation between depressive symptoms and patterns of interest among young Korean adults.

### **2.2 Participants**

In the present study, the participants were university students in Korea; we used non-probabilistic sample extraction convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria were young adults without neurological or psychiatric disorders and who agreed to include in the study. All participants provided demographic information and general characteristics and information related to pattern of interest and depressive symptoms. This study was approved by the Committee on Human Research at Cheongju University (1041107-201812-HR-029-01).

### **2.3 Measurements**

This study assessed depressive symptoms using the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), which meet with the depression criteria of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fourth Edition. The BDI is a questionnaire consisting of 21 sets of statements; each set is ranked in terms of severity and scored from 0 to 3. The BDI is self-rated scale to evaluate key symptoms of depression [13]. Total summed scores range from 0 to 63. The higher scores indicate greater depressive severity. The internal consistency range of the BDI is 0.73 to 0.92 and the mean value is 0.86 [14]. The BDI shows high internal consistency, and the alpha coefficients of the psychiatric and non-psychiatric populations are 0.86 and 0.81, respectively [15].

According to Hinsie and Campbell (quoted in Matsutsuyu in 1969), “interest is to capture and engage an individual's attention enough to attract, hold, and hire his own time.” The Interest Checklist is commonly used to gather information about an individual's interests. The purpose of the Interest Checklist is to organize the concentration of interest for each of 80 items; classify the types of interest as either no interest, casual interest, or strong interest; see whether the patient can express personal preferences; and see whether the patient can discriminate between choices. A pattern of interests evaluated regarding to five categories; manual skills, physical sports, social recreation, activity daily living, and cultural/educational [16]. In addition, the Interest Checklist investigates the past, present and future time periods, as well as the intensity of each interest (i.e., none, casual, or strong).

### 2.4 Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics ver. 24.0 (IBM Co., Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive analyses were used to describe participant characteristics and classification of depressive symptoms. Pearson correlations were calculated to determine relationships among continuous variables such as depressive symptoms and patterns of interest. The effects of interest patterns on depressive symptoms were analyzed using multiple regression analysis at a significance level of 0.05.

## 3. Results

The demographics and characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The average age of the participants was  $23.13 \pm 1.93$  years and the frequency of male was 12 (30.0%) and female was 28 (70.0%). The mean height of the participants was  $165.85 \pm 7.86$  cm and the mean weight of the participants was  $56.72 \pm 12.05$  kg. The characteristics of life style were conducted to interview about sleep time and frequency of exercise. The most common sleep time was those six hours (40.0%) and the most frequency of exercise was those 1 to 2 times a week (82.5%).

**Table 1. General characteristics of participants (N=40)**

Characteristics	Frequency (%)	Mean $\pm$ SD
Age (years)		22.13 $\pm$ 1.93
Height (cm)		165.85 $\pm$ 7.86
Weight (kg)		56.13 $\pm$ 14.05
Gender	Male	12 (30.0)
	Female	28 (70.0)
Sleep time	Less than 5 hours	10 (25.0)
	6 to 7 hours	26 (65.0)
	More than 7 hours	4 (10.0)
Frequency of exercise (per week)	1 to 2 times	33 (82.5)
	3 to 4 times	4 (10.0)
	More than 5 times	3 (7.5)

The characteristics according to classifications of depressive symptoms are presented in Table 2. Approximately 32.5% of the participants had not perceived depressive symptoms, while 22.5% had mild depressive symptoms and 10.0% had moderate depressive symptoms. Another 35.0% of the participants had slightly severe depressive symptoms. The participants were the young adults with moderate depressive symptoms as opposed to those without.

**Table 2. Classifications of depressive symptoms**

Classification	Frequency (%)
No depression	13 (32.5)
Mild depression	9 (22.5)
Moderate depression	4 (10.0)
Slightly severe depression	14 (35.0)

The relation between interest patterns and depressive symptoms is presented in Table 3. In particular, the depressive symptoms were significantly correlated with many past interests ( $p < .05$ ). Depressive symptoms were not significantly correlated with high current and future interests ( $p > .05$ ). Multiple regression analysis was performed on interest patterns to investigate their effect on depressive symptoms (Table 3). Analysis of interest patterns showed that a person with several experience in the past interest ( $\beta = .212$ ,  $p > .05$ ), a person with several experience in the current interest ( $\beta = .255$ ,  $p > .05$ ), and a person with several experience in the future interest ( $\beta = -.289$ ,  $p > .05$ ) did not have any effect on depressive symptoms.

**Table 3. Correlation and effectiveness interest patterns on depressive symptoms**

Independent variable	Pearson $r$	$R^2$	B	SE	$\beta$	$p$
Past interest	.277*	.065	.233	.427	.212	.427
Current interest	.261		.320	.369	.255	.369
Future interest	-.040		-.279	.135	-.289	.135

\* $p < 0.05$ , Dependent variable: Beck Depression Inventory, SE: Standard Error

#### 4. Discussion

The hypothesis in this study is that depression may be related to less interest in everyday life among young adults, as they have completed years of education. The purpose was to investigate the patterns of interest and depressive symptoms in young adults. In this study, the participants were young adults with moderate depressive symptoms, as opposed to those without depressive symptoms. In particular, these young adults had many experiences with past interests, which were more related to depressive symptoms.

Underwood and colleagues emphasized that symptoms of depression are also correlated with perceived stress [17]. Assessing stress symptoms in the clinical setting is imperative, as stress is highly correlated with depressive symptoms. Academic achievement among students in Korea is an issue of large interest for both students and parents, partly because academic achievement is directly related to university entrance and future employment opportunities [18]. Even if it remains unclear whether mental health problems in young adults negatively affect progress attainment, the collected works strongly suggests that the achievement of education has a significant impact on adult health [19]. In fact, when young adults with depressive symptoms have completed years of schooling, problems associated with low social relations can increase the possibility of mental health problems in adulthood. For this reason, we began to recognize the importance of studying the relationship between depression and adolescent interests.

Participants were more likely to have participated in past interest activities than participating in current interest activities at the time this study was conducted. However, the pattern of participation was not a significant predictor of the degree of depression. Although it is not a significant predictor, we should continue to encourage participation in a variety of interests, because our study shows that involvement in past interests has a correlation with the degree of depression. According to Kielhofner and colleagues,

because of the variety of jobs people enjoy and routinely pursue, their convictions regarding joy obtained from activities can vary [20]. Individuals experience different life events and environments, and triggers for depression vary depending on individual experiences. Humans have different developmental tasks that need to be solved throughout the lifespan, and negative life experiences often manifest differently across age groups.

Although the causes of depression may be the same in males and females, the consequences of depression may differ by gender. Depressive symptoms, which often include self-criticism and feelings of helplessness, are consistent with behavioral expectations associated with the traditional female gender role and are inconsistent with behavioral expectations associated with the traditional male gender role. Because depression is more common among women, and because symptoms associated with depression are inconsistent with the male gender role, societal reactions to depressed men are likely to be more negative compared to similarly depressed women [21]. If depressed males are more likely respond to negative reaction from parents, teachers, and/or peers than female, then we can expect to find evidence that the boy's educational trajectory is more easily disrupted by symptoms associated with depression.

The number of participants in this study was small, and no comparison was made according to gender. In addition, there is a disadvantage in that the participants were not randomly extracted and it is difficult to generalize the results of the study. Further research examining the experiences of young adults and the degree of depression according to gender should be executed more specifically and studied in detail.

## **5. Conclusion**

Finally, this study investigated the relationships among young Korean adults' depressive symptoms and patterns of interest. The participants were young adults with moderate depressive symptoms among participants in this study. This study was to examine patterns of interest and their effects on depressive symptoms in young adults. In particular, these young adults had many experiences with past interests, which were more related to depressive symptoms. Participation in a variety of activities can help prevent depression. Participation in activities of interest can, therefore, be of great help during middle- and late-adult development. This study will provide evidence a future guide for depressive symptoms and patterns of interest for mental health management with young adults.

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