WHEN WORRIERS AVOID THEIR THOUGHTS:
COGNITIVE AVOIDANCE PREDICTS COMORBID SYMPTOMS

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Introduction

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is characterized by excessive and uncontrollable worry

Prior research:
GAD has been associated with several dysfunctional cognitive thinking styles and beliefs including:

- Metacognitive Beliefs (Hirsch et al., 2013)
- Intolerance of Uncertainty (Buhr & Dugas, 2006)
- Fear of Emotions (Buhr & Dugas, 2012)
- Cognitive Avoidance (Dugas et al., 2005)
- Negative Problem Orientation (Ladoucer et al., 1999)

Present study:
Examined whether these different thinking styles and beliefs common to GAD are also associated with symptoms of anxiety-related disorders, depression, and bipolar disorder amongst high worriers

Methods

Data collection: Online survey through Qualtrics

Sample: 565 pre-screened high worry undergraduate MacEwan psychology students (M_{age} 21.2 years; 81% female)

Self-report measures:
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 Item Scale
- Inventory of Depression and Anxiety Symptoms-II
- Short Health Anxiety Inventory
- Metacognitions Questionnaire-30 (MCQ-30)
- Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale-18 (IUS-18)
- Affective Control Scale (ACS)
- Negative Problem Orientation Questionnaire (NPOQ)
- Cognitive Avoidance Questionnaire (CAQ)

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Results

In high worriers, avoiding one's thoughts was a consistent predictor of emotional disorder symptoms

Panic Disorder

Measures	t	pr
MCQ-30 NBW	3.34**	.16
MCQ-30 CC	4.03**	.19
ACS Depression	2.88**	.14
ACS Anxiety	4.92**	.30
CAQ	2.27*	.11

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Traumatic Avoidance

Measures	t	pr
MCQ-30 CSC	2.04*	.10
CAQ	10.89**	.46

Traumatic Intrusions

Measures	t	pr
ACS Depression	3.91**	.18
ACS Anxiety	2.25*	.11
CAQ	5.38**	.25

Depression

Measures	t	pr
MCQ-30 NBW	2.39*	.12
MCQ-30 CC	3.78**	.18
ACS Anxiety	2.23*	.11
ACS Depression	6.28**	.29
NPOQ	2.80**	.14
CAQ	2.14*	.10

Health Anxiety

Measures	t	pr
ACS Anxiety	3.28**	.16
NPOQ	2.00*	.05
CAQ	2.17*	.10

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Checking

Measures	t	pr
MCQ-30 PBW	4.99**	.23
CAQ	5.47**	.21

Ordering

Measures	t	pr
MCQ-30 PBW	4.41**	.21
ACS Depression	-2.28*	-.11
CAQ	3.56**	.17

Cleaning

Measures	t	pr
MCQ-PBW	2.68**	.13
MCQ-NCT	2.39*	.11
CAQ	2.49*	.12

Mania

Measures	t	pr
MCQ-30 NBW	2.99**	.14
MCQ-30 PBW	4.26**	.20
MCQ-30 CSC	2.05*	.10
ACS Anxiety	3.60**	.17
CAQ	2.84**	.13

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Measures	t	pr
MCQ-30 NBW	5.73**	.26
MCQ-30 PBW	2.26*	.11
IUS-18	3.24**	.15
ACS Depression	2.57*	.12

Social Anxiety Disorder

Measures	t	pr
MCQ-30 NBW	-3.59**	-.17
MCQ-30 CC	2.54*	.12
IUS-18	2.62**	.12
ACS Anxiety	7.40**	.33
NPOQ	4.14**	.19
CAQ	3.13**	.15

*p < .05, **p < .01

Implications

- Future research may wish to explore the role of cognitive avoidance in SAD, PD, HA, PTSD, OCD, depression, and bipolar disorder
- When treating these different disorders, or anxious clients with comorbid disorders, therapists may wish to target cognitive avoidance