

Abstract

Next to the traditional medical concept of depression, there is an expert opinion suggesting that depression is a functional adaptation to adversity. In the theoretical part of the thesis, we present the adaptive hypothesis of depression, the Analytical-Rumination Hypothesis (ARH). According to ARH, depression has evolved as an adaptive response to the complex problems. Depressive symptoms, such as anhedonia, social isolation, and psychomotor retardation, may help individuals to undisturbedly analyze their personal problems in a process called analytical rumination. The limited ability to focus on an external problem, e.g. on neuropsychological tests, is a by-product of analytical rumination.

The aim of the dissertation thesis is to test the ARH. In the practical part, we present five studies using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, cross-sectional and longitudinal design, and samples with different statuses (clinical and non-clinical).

The results of Study 1 confirm that depression is a response to a complex problem. Using a qualitative methodology, Study 2 examined the form of rumination and detected the presence of adaptive rumination in depressed individuals (causal analysis, analysis of the aspects of the problem and problem-solving analysis). The results of cross-sectional Study 3 and longitudinal Study 4 showed that the problem-solving analysis is associated with alleviation of depressive symptoms, but not with the reduction of problem complexity. Study 5 confirmed that the performance of depressed individuals in selected neuropsychological tests is disturbed. The results showed that the causal analysis has a negative effect on some neuropsychological assessment scores, but only in people recovering from depression. In the severe cases of major depressive episode (at the beginning of hospitalization), there was no association of the analytical rumination and cognitive performance.

These findings are in line with ARH, while they support the existence of adaptive rumination that is analytical in its nature. Problem-solving analysis was shown to be associated with the relief of depression. Practical implication of the findings are being discussed.

Key words: depression, analysis, rumination, evolution, adaptation