P-122 - COGNITIVE SCHEMAS PREDICTING ANXIETY AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS: THE ROLE OF DYSFUNCTIONAL COPING STRATEGIES

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Objectives: Schema Therapy Model proposes coping as one of the mechanism through which schemas lead to the development of psychological symptoms. Thus, it was hypothesized that the association between early maladaptive schemas and symptoms of anxiety and depression will be mediated in part by the use of dysfunctional coping strategies.
Method: A sample of 374 university students participated in this longitudinal study (5 months between T1 and T2), completing measures of stressful life events, coping, early maladaptive schemas, anxiety, and depression.
Results: Hierarchical multiple regressions analyses revealed that coping strategies mediated the relationship between the schema domains and distress. In particular, disengagement coping strategies (i.e. avoidance, denial and wishful thinking) fully mediated the relationship between Impaired Limits domain and anxiety symptoms. Partial mediations were found for the Disconnection & Rejection, Impaired Autonomy & Performance and Other-Directedness Domains in relation with anxiety symptoms. For depressive symptoms, the mediating role of disengagement coping was significant for the Impaired Limits and Other-Directedness Domains.
Conclusions: These findings expand knowledge of how early maladaptive schemas lead to distress. Young (1990) proposed avoidance as the mechanism through which the schemas operate, and the present study shows disengagement strategies to be the main mediators. Additionally, significant differences in the mediation model for anxiety and depression symptoms point to specificity in the cognitive content and the way it operates. Moreover, using a prospective design suggests that cognitive appraisal precedes coping, and therefore, interventions should focus on modifying the schemas as precursors of an individual's actions.