Background

Feelings of toxic shame and toxic guilt are common symptoms of many mental disorders. Both these feelings arise from self-referential processing and it is supposed that they 1) result from maladaptive emotional schemes developed during childhood in relation with feeling warm, safe and cared for in childhood. The sum of scores of the EMWSS items was used for the statistical analysis.

Experience in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures (ECR-RS; Fraley et al., 2011). The ECR-RS is a 36-item measure designed to assess adult attachment in relationships with mother, father, romantic partner and best friend. The sum of scores of the anxiety scale and the avoidance scale were used for the statistical analysis.

Interpersonal guilt questionnaire-67 (IGQ-67; O’Connor et al., 1997). The IGQ-67 contains 67 items which attempt to measure four types of guilt: survivor guilt (22 items), separation guilt (16 items), omnipotent responsibility guilt (14 items), and self-hate (15 items). Only the omnipotent responsibility guilt subscale of the TOCS was used for the statistical analysis.

Test of Self-Conscious Affect-3 (TOSCA-3S, Tangney, Dearing, 2003). The TOSCA-3S is a 21-item measure which measures guilt proneness, attachment avoidance and anxiety prior to the PBSP intervention which uses the image of “ideal parents” to provide corrective experience to patients with different mental disorders.

Sussex-Oxford Compassion for the Self Scale (SOCS; Gu et al., 2019). The SOCS-S is a 20-item measure which measures shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, detachment and externalization (blaming others). Only the shame-proneness subscale of the SOCS was used for the statistical analysis.

Self-compassion Scale (SCS-CZ, Neff, 2003; Czech version Benda, Reichová, 2016). The original English version is a 26-item self-report inventory. In the Czech version, six items were removed from the original scale (items 3, 9, 15, 21, 22 and 23) to achieve the same factor structure as in the original scale (see Benda, Reichová, 2016). The sum of scores of all 20 items was used for the statistical analysis.

Results

Correlations between study variables

The intercorrelations between all study variables in both samples are presented in Figures 1, 2 and 3. In sample 1 weak to mild correlations were found between parental emotional warmth, omnipotence guilt and self-compassion. In sample 2 weak to moderate correlations were found between attachment avoidance or anxiety, shame-proneness and self-compassion. As expected, self-compassion was negatively correlated with omnipotence guilt (r = -14; p < 0.01) and shame-proneness (r = -50; p < 0.05). Parental emotional warmth was positively correlated with self-compassion (r = 22; p < 0.01) and negatively with omnipotence guilt (r = -14; p < 0.01). Attachment anxiety was negatively correlated with self-compassion (r = -41; p < 0.01) and positively with shame-proneness (r = 23; p < 0.01). Attachment avoidance was not significantly correlated with shame-proneness or self-compassion.

Discussion

We hypothesize that deprivation of basic needs in childhood as well as the child’s efforts to fill theholes in th eroles, leads to lack of self-compassion and toxic shame-proneness and omnipotence guilt-proneness in adulthood. And these transdiagnostic factors seem to cause many symptoms of mental disorders (Benda, 2019). The corrective experience with the image of “ideal parents”, on the other hand, probably induces memory reconsolidation (Ecker, 2018), changes the relevant emotional schemas, encourages the development of self-compassion and, as a consequence, many symptoms disappear. However, it is difficult to test these hypotheses through correlation analysis. And the fact that there is no measure of fullfillment of basic needs makes it even harder.

Therefore, in future research it may be useful:

1) to develop a new questionnaire suitable to measure the level of fulfillment of basic needs during childhood.

2) to compare the levels of self-compassion, shame-proneness and omnipotence guilt-proneness before and after the PBSP intervention which uses the image of “ideal parents” to provide corrective experience to patients with different mental disorders.

3) closely compare findings of research on PBSP-research on self-compassion and research on shame.

Conclusions

Two independent surveys confirmed links between 1) parental emotional warmth in childhood or attachment in adulthood, 2) shame-proneness or omnipotence guilt and 3) self-compassion.

References


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