Introduction

- Anxiety and anxiety disorders are highly prevalent, and are amongst the most common mental health disorders in Canada. (Stewart, P et al. The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada. (2006).) Without treatment, anxiety disorders result in severe suffering and impairment of functioning for the individual.

- Eysneck (et. al., 2007) notes that there has been “broad support for the notion that anxiety disrupts the functioning of goal directed attention systems”. The negative effects of anxiety on processing efficacy depends on two factors of attention control: inhibition and shifting (Eysneck et. al., 2007).

- Purpose of study: find individual differences that maintain anxiety and identify how these differences relate to an individuals cognitive processes.

- We consider a possible correlational relation between two types of anxiety (trait anxiety and state anxiety) and attention control.

Regression for Attention Control on State Anxiety

A Pearson Correlations test showed a significant negative correlation between State Anxiety Score and the Attention Control Scale with r = -0.3515865. Findings support the null alternative hypothesis, t(669) = -9.714, p < 0.001. 95% CI [-0.416993, -0.2834409].

Regression for Attention Control on Trait Anxiety

A Pearson Correlations test showed a significant negative correlation between trait anxiety score and attention control scale with r = -0.2834409. Findings support the alternative hypothesis, t(669) = -7.7769, p < 0.001. 95% CI [-0.3558716, -0.2169796].

Measurement of Attention Control

The attention control scale was used to measure attention control in participants. The attention scale is a 20 item self-report measurement on a 5 point Likert scale. Nine items focus on attention and eleven focus on attention shifting in participants. Cronbach’s alpha of 0.82 for focus and 0.71 for attention shifting. (Judah. M, Grant D, Mills A, Luchene W, 2014).

Measurement of Trait Anxiety

The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory Self – Questionnaire was used to measure both State Anxiety and Trait Anxiety in participants. 20 questions measure State anxiety, and 20 measure trait anxiety. Cronbach’s alpha for Trait Anxiety for undergraduate males and females is 0.90 and 0.89, respectively. The State Anxiety Cronbach’s alpha for both genders is 0.89 (Spielberger. C, Gorsuch. R, Lushene. R, 1970).

Participants

670 participants from an undergraduate introductory to psychology course (M=20.43, SD=5.42) participated in this study.

Exclusion Criteria

Participant data was excluded from the analysis if they failed to complete both the Trait Anxiety Score measurement and the Attention Control Scale measurement.

Discussion

Higher self-reported attention control was associated with lower self-reported trait and state anxiety.

These results indicated either attention control is protective against anxiety, the anxiety has a detrimental effect on attention control, or some combination of both. Future research is needed to determine the nature of the relationship between attention and anxiety.