

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**DEPRESSION AS A FUNCTION OF  
STRESSFUL LIFE  
EVENTS, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND  
PERSONALITY**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

of Master of Arts

in Psychology

at Massey University

Tracy Amanda Freedman

2000

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to extend a sincere thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Dave Clarke. His intellectual guidance, his support, patience and time has been invaluable during the course of my research.

I extend my appreciation to the Massey University Graduate Research Fund for the financial assistance used to aid in conducting this research.

I am grateful to my family and friends for their encouragement and support. I would like to thank my employer and friend, Julia, for being so understanding and accomodating throughout the year. A special thanks to Belinda, Karen, Nikki and Debbie who's support and fun times are greatly appreciated.

My sincere thanks goes to my partner, Rhys. I am grateful for all his help, support, and ability to make me laugh during difficult times.

Lastly, as always, I am grateful to my family. To Joan, Johnny and Lauren, although we are geographically apart your love, support and belief in me is always felt and provides me with the strength to succeed.

## CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>vii</b>

### **Chapter One :                    Introduction**

1.	Introduction	1
1.1	Depression Defined	1
1.2	Social Support Defined	3
1.3	Stressful Life Events Defined	4
1.4	Personality Factors Defined	4

### **Chapter Two                    Research Rationale and Background**

2.	Introduction	7
2.1	Depression	7
	2.1.1 Depression and Personal Resources.	8
	2.1.2 Depressed Clients' Attributions of Responsibility for the causes and solutions to their problems as well as their self-appraised problem-solving ability.	11
	2.1.3 Loneliness, Family Environment and Depression.	12
	2.1.4 Gender Differences in Depression.	13
2.2	Stressful Life Events	15
	2.2.1 The Role of Stressful Life Events in Depression	15
	2.2.2 Stressful Life Events vs. Daily Hassles.	17
	2.2.3 Stressful Life Events and Mediating Factors.	18
	2.2.4 Stressful Life Events in Terms of College Students.	19

2.3	Social Support	20
2.3.1	Social Support and Affect/Depression	20
2.3.2	Perceived Support and Received Support.	21
2.3.3	Models of Social Support.	22
2.3.4	Positive and Negative Effects of Social Support.	22
2.4	Personality	23
2.4.1	Extroversion, Socialization (Psychoticism) & Emotionality (Neuroticism).	23
2.4.2	Personality Variables and Coping Styles.	27
2.4.3	Optimism and Self-esteem.	28
2.4.4	Anxiety and Reactivity.	29
2.5	Research Justification.	30
2.6	Thesis Objectives.	31

### **Chapter Three                      Research Design and Methodology**

3.	Introduction	32
3.1	The Sample	32
3.2	Survey Procedures	33
3.3	Measurement Instruments	34
3.3.1	The Depression Inventory	34
3.3.2	The College Life Stress Inventory	35
3.3.3	The Brief Social Support Questionnaire	36
3.3.4	The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire	38
3.4	Analysis of Data	39

<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>Results</b>	
4.	Introduction	41
4.1	Descriptives	41
4.2	Relationship among the variables	45
4.3	Depression, life events and social support	47
4.4	Satisfaction with social supports, number of social supports and personality traits	50
<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	
5.	Introduction	52
5.1	Range and skewness of scores for the total sample	52
5.2	Gender differences	52
5.3	Relationship between the variables	53
5.4	Depression as a function of life events, social support and personality	56
5.5	Satisfaction with social support as a function of number of social supports and personality	58
<b>Chapter Six</b>	<b>Conclusions and Future Considerations</b>	
6.	Introduction	62
6.1	Conclusions of the Study	62
6.2	Limitations of the Study	63
6.3	Future Research Considerations	63
<b>References</b>		<b>65</b>

**Appendices****83**

- A1 Graphs of variables indicating the range of scores and skewness of the distribution.
- A2 Information Sheet
- A3 Questionnaire

## LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1.** Demographic information of the study sample.
- Table 2.** Means, standard deviations, ranges, and skewness of scores on the continuous scales and coefficients of internal consistency ( $\alpha$ ).
- Table 3.** Means and standard deviations for men and women on each of the continuous variables.
- Table 4.** Correlations among the variables.
- Table 5.** Results of hierarchical regression analysis for the effects of life events, social support and personality traits on depression, controlling for age, gender and socially desirable responses.
- Table 6.** Results of hierarchical regression analysis for the prediction of satisfaction with social support (SS), by number of social supports and personality traits, controlling for age, gender and social desirable responses.

## **ABSTRACT**

The effects of stressful life events, personality factors (extroversion, socialization/psychoticism and emotionality/neuroticism) and social support on depression were assessed. A questionnaire consisting of The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, College Life Stress Inventory, Depression Inventory, and The Brief Social Support Questionnaire was administered to a sample of 124 volunteer university students enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses. Results showed that other than for socialization, with women scoring higher on average than men, there were no significant differences between men and women, or between ethnic groups, on any of the variables. Age was found to be inversely related to stressful university life events. Emotional instability and low satisfaction with social supports predicted depression. The effects of university life events on depression were mediated by satisfaction with social supports, but not by number of social supports. Emotional stability was found to predict satisfaction with social supports. Emotional instability predicted severity of university life events and explained the largest proportion of variance in depression scores.