

## **Abstract**

**Background:** Stress had been postulated to play a significant role in the etiology of many psychiatric disorders. There were only limited studies on how subjective appraised stressfulness of daily hassles mediated emotional reactivity in bipolar disorder. Moreover, the effect of prior life events on emotional reactivity to daily life stress in the psychiatric population had shown divergent findings. The present study investigated the effect of subjective appraised stressfulness of daily hassles on emotional reactivity, and whether prior life events influenced subjective appraised stressfulness and modified emotional reactivity to daily life stress, in bipolar disorder.

**Method:** Out-patients with bipolar disorder (N = 41) were studied with the Experience Sampling Method (a structured electronic diary technique), ten times a day for 6 consecutive days, to assess: (1) subjective appraised stressfulness of daily hassles; and (2) emotional reactivity conceptualized as changes in positive affect, negative affect, and the newly added manic-related mood. Prior life events and the associated stress were assessed with the Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Clinical symptomatology was assessed with standardized symptom rating scales.

**Results:** Multilevel regression analyses showed that an increase in subjective appraised stressfulness of daily hassles was significantly associated with a decrease in positive affect and an increase in negative affect, but without significant change in manic-related mood.

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Moreover, prior life events did not show significant association with subjective appraised stressfulness of daily hassles, and did not modify any emotional reactivity to daily life stress.

**Conclusion:** Findings successfully extended results from previous studies to bipolar disorder, proving that subjective appraised stressfulness of daily hassles influenced emotional reactivity through changes in affect, while being less influential on forms of manic-related symptom manifestation. This provided valuable implications for directions of psychotherapeutic interventions. Moreover, the absence of synergistic effect of prior life events on emotional reactivity to daily life stress was discussed, with considerations of possible factors related to momentary assessments and definitions of life events.