Abstract

Introduction

Social anxiety has been revealed to have a positive association with loneliness, yet little research has been focused on non-clinical young adults. Experiment sampling method (ESM) have demonstrated efficacy in mitigating the recall basis in temporal association study, yet research has not examined in this method for social anxiety and loneliness. This study examines moment-to-moment associations between social anxiety and loneliness among non-clinical young adults.

Methods

A total of 134 individuals without past or current psychiatric diagnosis were assessed with clinical interview and completed an experience sampling method (ESM) assessment ten times per day for six days. ESM data were analysed by conducting time-lagged multilevel regression modelling.

Result

Multilevel linear regression modelling showed significant and positive associations between social anxiety and loneliness at the same time point (β=0.487, SE=0.014, p<0.001). Time-lagged analysis showed that social anxiety predicted an increase in loneliness at the subsequent moment (β=0.050, SE=0.015, p<0.001). Conversely, loneliness did not predict the change of social anxiety at the subsequent moment (β=0.031, SE=0.018, p=0.085).

Conclusion

Social anxiety was found to drive and exacerbate loneliness, but not as a consequence of loneliness among non-clinical young adults. Our results suggest that attention to improve social anxiety in early development of the symptoms may reduce the loneliness and prevent it becomes a prolonged experience.