The association between maladaptive daydreaming and obsessive-compulsive disorder: An examination of mediating mechanisms

Michal Harel-Schwarzmann

Abstract

Maladaptive Daydreaming (MD), a mental phenomenon that consumes long hours every day and can lead to significant dysfunction and distress, is reported by an increasing number of people around the world. MD is an addictive mental behavior associated with a wide range of disorders, including obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). We set out to broaden the scientific knowledge about MD by examining its relationship with obsessive-compulsive disorder. We also examined whether MD is distinct from an OCD, and explored whether it is more related to the obsessions or compulsions. We also investigated whether dissociation, childhood trauma, a low sense of control, and mind-wandering mediated the relationship between MD and OCD.

The study sample included 510 adult volunteers. In line with our hypothesis, we found a positive association between MD and an OCD, as well as differences between the two phenomena. Further to our exploratory research question, MD was more related to obsessions than compulsions. Dissociation and low sense of control mediated the association between MD and OCD. However, childhood trauma and mind-wandering did not mediate that relationship. We found a high frequency of repetitive physical obsessive-compulsive symptoms among the research participants. These symptoms resemble repetitive movements observed in MD (Bigelsen & Kelley, 2015; Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011; Somer, 2002; Somer et al., 2016) and implying a connection between MD and body related OCD symptoms.

The findings of this study contribute to a more accurate differential diagnoses of MD by reducing potential confusion with OCD. This new knowledge could aid in the development of effective evidence-based interventions, perhaps borrowed from OCD treatments. Moreover, the mediating role of dissociation and a low sense of control in the relationship between MD and OCD may also help to optimize the treatment of MD by addressing these factors.