

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY: DEPRESSION

Outline and evaluate the cognitive approach to explaining depression

The cognitive approach to explaining depression assumes that it is caused by faulty thinking patterns and irrational beliefs. **Arron Beck (1967)** developed a cognitive explanation of depression which has three components; cognitive bias; negative self-schemas; and the negative triad. Cognitive bias is where depressed individuals focus on the negative aspects of a situation and distort information giving a biased view. Whereas negative self-schemas are when depressed individuals possess negative beliefs about themselves, often stemming from negative experiences. They store these schemas in memory and refer back to them causing an inaccurate view of things. **Beck (1967)** created the negative triad to explain why some people are more vulnerable to depression. The negative triad suggests that depressed individuals have negative and irrational views about themselves, the world, and the future. People with depression are more likely to focus on the negative aspects of a situation, while ignoring the positives. They are prone to distorting and misinterpreting information, which leads to the development of cognitive biases. **Boury et al (2001)** found that patients with depression were more likely to misinterpret information negatively, holding a cognitive bias and feel hopeless about their future, which supports **Beck's** theory. There is also some evidence to show an association between cognitive vulnerability and depression. **Clark & Beck (1999)** suggest that cognitive vulnerabilities are more common in depressed individuals. Moreover, **Cohen et al (2019)** tracked the development of 473 adolescents and found cognitive vulnerability predicted later depression. **Cohen et al** concluded that screening young people for cognitive vulnerability can help reduce the risk of depression in the future.

Albert Ellis (1962) took a different approach from **Beck** when explaining depression. According to **Ellis**, good mental health is the result of rational thinking which allows people to be happy and pain free. He developed the ABC model, which is a three-stage model used to explain how irrational thoughts could lead to depression. Part A of the ABC model is the activating event or trigger, for example a patient with depression may have lost their job or had their marriage breakdown. Part B of the ABC model is the belief that people hold based on their experience of the event, which can either be rational or irrational. Part C of the ABC model is the behavioural consequences for the individual. According to **Ellis**, rational beliefs lead to healthy emotional outcomes and irrational beliefs can lead to unhealthy emotional outcomes, including depression. However, the ABC model does not explain all cases of depression and can vary between individuals. Nevertheless, the ABC model is a useful way of helping people break down their negative thinking. An effective therapy that uses the ABC model is Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), which was developed by **Ellis**. Research support from **David et al (2018)** found that REBT can change negative beliefs and reduce symptoms of depression.

The cognitive explanation of depression ignores any biological factors that might be causing it. Biological factors like imbalances in biochemistry might be a more scientific explanation for depression. This is often reflected in the success with drug therapy such as SSRIs. However, one strength of the cognitive explanation for depression is its application to therapy such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). CBT attempts to identify and challenge negative, irrational thoughts and has been used successfully to treat people with depression.

