

Molly C. Dougherty, PhD, RN
Editor, *Nursing Research*
School of Nursing
CB# 7460, UNC—Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7460

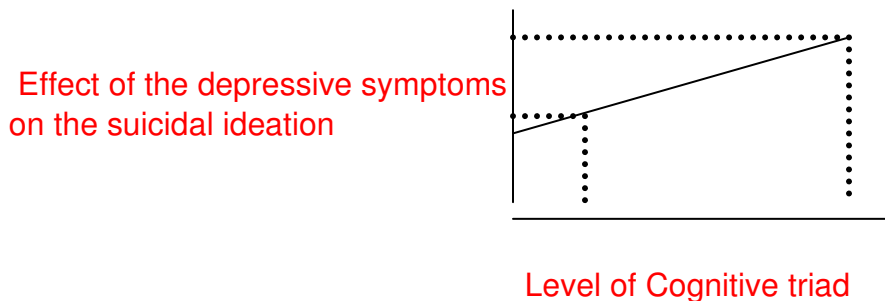
Dear Dr. Dougherty:

After reading the article “The mediating and moderating roles of the cognitive triad on adolescent suicidal ideation” published in July/August, 2007, vol. 56(4), 252-259, I realized that there is an important error in the Discussion section due to the misinterpretations of study results (p 257, 2nd paragraph). The interpretations of the impact of moderator variable, Cognitive triad on the effect of depressive symptoms on the suicidal ideation were incorrect.

Here is the quote from the text: “ The cognitive triad significantly and positively moderated the relationship between depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation.....who had a higher level of depressive symptoms and a more negative cognitive triad showed a higher level of suicidal ideation.” (p. 257)

According to the definition of moderator, which is measured as a continuous variable such as the variable of Cognitive triad in this study, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable changes gradually while the moderator variable changes (Baron & David, 1986). Referring to the table 3 in the text, there are a number of points to note about the interpretations of the moderator variable.

1. The main effect of the Depressive symptoms on the Suicidal ideation was positively related ($\beta = .38$). The effect of the Depressive symptoms on the Suicidal ideation varies as the Cognitive triad changes and the Cognitive triad changes the effect of the Depressive symptoms on the Suicidal ideation linearly and positively ($\beta = .54$). The way Cognitive triad alters the effect of the Depressive symptoms on the Suicidal ideation can be pictured as the following figure.



2. The effect of the Depressive symptoms on the Suicidal ideation is gradually and steady changes (Increases) while the score of Cognitive triad changes (increases), on the contrary, while the score of Cognitive triad decreases then the effect of the Depressive symptoms on the Suicidal ideation decreases. For students who have higher scores on Cognitive triad (more positive thought patterns), the effect of the Depressive symptoms on the Suicidal ideation is larger (more depression with higher suicidal ideation). For those who have more positive cognitive triad, when they experience higher level of depression, they tend to have a higher level of suicidal ideation. However, as the scores on Cognitive triad decreases (negative thought patterns), the effect of the Depressive symptoms on the Suicidal ideation is less, this means that students who have more negative cognitive triad, they won't have a high level of suicidal ideation compared to those who have positive triad, while they experience higher level of depression.

The authors interpreted the test results in an opposite way although they provided empirical evidences to support their arguments. Unfortunately, they misinterpreted the findings, which may lead to a misunderstanding of the results and a misunderstanding of the definition of a moderator. Accurate interpretations may help nursing researchers have a better understating of the applications of the concept of moderator in the future study.

Reference:

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. Journal of Personality and, Social Psychology, 51, 1173-1182.

Sincerely,

Huey-Shys Chen

Huey-Shys Chen, PhD, RN, CHES
Assistant Professor
School of Nursing
University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey
chenhu@umdnj.edu