

The BDI of the beholder

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Using the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck *et al.*, 1961), MacInnes *et al.* (2001) argue that ecstasy users are more depressed than their peers. The ecstasy users' average score was 9.2 which the authors state indicates 'mild depression'. This score was significantly different from their non-drug using control group (who only scored 5.2). Tse and Bond (2001) report a study where they recruited healthy non-drug using male volunteers and then randomly allocated them to citalopram or placebo conditions. The mean score on the BDI for the placebo group prior to the start of the study was 9.1. The only subject to be excluded from this study scored 23 on the BDI, which the authors interpreted as 'moderate depression'. Although Tse and Bond (2001) do not explicitly state that they considered a score of 9.1 to be within the non-depressed range for this scale, the inclusion of these subjects indicates that they are 'normal healthy volunteers'. This presents an interesting dilemma, as these two studies from the same Journal demonstrate different interpretations of virtually identical scores on the same scale. Just like beauty, scores on the BDI appear to be in the eye of the beholder.

Beck *et al.* (1961) report that a mean BDI score of 10.9 indicates no clinically relevant depression and that a score of 18.7 indicates mild depression. This is at odds with the interpretation of MacInnes *et al.* (2001) who state that 'Beck *et al.* (1961) suggest that a score of 9 represents mild depression'. It would appear that the interpretation of Tse and Bond (2001) is correct.

Several other studies report higher scores on the BDI for ecstasy users when compared to non-drug using controls, although they are not indicative of clinically relevant depression (Curran and Travill, 1997; Verkes *et al.*, 2001). Higher scores on depression rating scales have also been reported for ecstasy using subjects in studies

where subjects diagnosed with an Axis I disorder were excluded (Gerra *et al.*, 1998, 2000; Verkes *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, no study to date has found scores on depression rating scales that are indicative of clinical depression in ecstasy users. There is no evidence to suggest that ecstasy users are at risk for developing 'a more severe depressive syndrome' as a direct consequence of their ecstasy use.

References

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