The Role of Future Time Perspective and Perceived Stress in Delay Discounting

Usha Persaud
Mercy College School of Social & Behavioral Sciences
Department of Psychology  Advisor: Lisa Ecklund-Flores, PhD

INTRODUCTION

• Each day is filled with new choices and decisions to be made which inevitably affect our daily functioning. When making an everyday choice, for instance, one might choose to enjoy the immediate gratification of an impulse purchase instead of saving up for important future financial obligations, such as monthly bills.

• Delay discounting rates quantitatively describe a person’s level of impulsivity and self-control by measuring preference for a small, immediate reward versus a large, delayed reward. Typically, the longer it takes to receive a reward, the less valued it becomes.

• A person’s perception of the future affects present actions as well as planning and executing future goals. Stress directly affects behavioral, cognitive, and physical functioning. Both variables have been shown to alter the decision making process.

• Previous research has shown that future time perspective and stress each affect decision making, but very few have investigated both factors in relation to delay discounting.

• The first aim of the present study was to explore how future thinking relates to decision making in a monetary decision making task. Second, we examined how self-reports of stress interact with future time perspective to influence delay discounting.

METHODS

• Statistical analyses consisted of Pearson correlations between the variables of interest and a univariate analysis of variance to investigate the main effects and interactions between variables.

• Table 1. Participant demographics (N = 42)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>PSS</th>
<th>ZTPI Future</th>
<th>k-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSS</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>6.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>k-value</td>
<td>p = .02 PSS</td>
<td>.049*</td>
<td>p = .904</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZTPI Future</td>
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<td>0.46</td>
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<td>k-value</td>
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Table 1. Descriptive statistics (mean and SD) and correlation matrix of the variables of interest

RESULTS

• There was a significant interaction between future orientation and perceived stress in relation to the delay discounting task (See Figure 1). Perceived stress became more important in decision making when individuals were more future oriented. More specifically, in highly future oriented individuals, stress was a significant mediator and moderate predictor of delay discounting performance.

• The only demographic variable that was related to discounting rate was gender. Females displayed a significantly greater preference for smaller, sooner rewards and more impulsiveness in comparison to males.

CONCLUSIONS

• Based on our findings, we can conclude that perceived stress matters more in decision making depending on a person’s future time perspective. For individuals who are less future oriented and more present oriented, their perception of stress does not greatly affect their choices between smaller, immediate rewards and larger, later rewards. Such behavior may be related to their “in the moment” and present oriented outlook on life.

• For individuals who are highly future oriented, high perceived stress is related to an increase in impulsivity. These individuals chose more small, immediate rewards than large, later ones. Since future oriented people are constantly planning for the future and delaying gratification in favor of future goals, a high degree of stress seems to dramatically influence their decision making abilities. It may also be that when stressed about the future, these individuals are less likely to accept future rewards and accept more immediate rewards.

• Evidently, future thinking in combination with stress has a direct interactive influence on delay discounting rates and thus, a bias toward small, immediate rewards or greater impulsivity. Overall, the study was consistent with the theories and prior research related to time perspective (e.g. Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999; Lempert et al., 2012).

• Individual appraisal of stress should be strongly considered in time perspective and decision making research as well as in cognitive and behavioral assessment.

• These findings highlight the importance of cognitive-behavioral stress management on decision making ability and can be further studied in behavioral and clinical conditions (i.e. impulsive control disorders, problem gambling, addictive disorders, etc.) This research adds valuable information to the behavioral decision making literature and clinical implications relating to the cognitive and behavioral roles of stress and time perception.

REFERENCES


FIGURE 1

Effect of Perceived Stress and Future Orientation on Discounting Rates

Notes: Groups: Low Perceived Stress, High Perceived Stress, Low Future Orientation, High Future Orientation

Mean (SD) & Percentages

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Table 2. Descriptive statistics (mean and SD) and correlation matrix of the variables of interest

Notes: PSS: Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983); ZTPI future: Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory Future subscale (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). A value closer to zero (i.e., a value closer to the cognitive and behavioral stress management on decision making ability and can be further studied in behavioral and clinical conditions (i.e. impulsive control disorders, problem gambling, addictive disorders, etc.) This research adds valuable information to the behavioral decision making literature and clinical implications relating to the cognitive and behavioral roles of stress and time perception.

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