

**Hartley, S.L., & MacLean, W.E. (2009). Depression in Adults With Mild Intellectual Disability: Role of Stress, Attributions, and Coping. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 114(3):147-160.**

Depression frequently occurs in adults with intellectual disability, yet little research has been done regarding the processes that contribute to depression in this population. In the general population negative attributions or causal explanations for negative stressful events is seen as a process critical to maintaining depression, and research suggests that the same cognitive patterns also exist in depressed individuals with intellectual disability (ID). This study compared the frequency and stress impact of social situations and looked at the coping strategies and causal attributions for 47 depressed and 47 nondepressed adults with mild ID. The participants in both groups were matched on other characteristics including gender, living status, and ethnicity. For each participant cognitive ability, adaptive behaviour, depression, negative social situations, stressful daily situations or life events, causal attributions for stressful social interactions and coping strategies employed in stressful social interactions were assessed.

**Key Findings**

- The depressed group reported a higher frequency and stress impact of stressful social interactions than the nondepressed group.
- When asked the question “What caused that event to occur?” the depressed group was more likely to attribute the cause of the event to be global (non-specific), internal, and stable than the nondepressed group.
- The depressed group reported a significantly lower percentage of coping efforts than did the nondepressed group.
- The depressed group reported significantly fewer active coping strategies and significantly more avoidant coping strategies than did the nondepressed group
  - *Active coping*: cognitive or behavioural effort to manage the stressful event itself through directly altering the event, seeking solutions to alter it, or by altering ones emotional response to the event by focusing directly on it in an active and constructive fashion.
  - *Avoidant coping*: a behavioural or cognitive effort to avoid the stressful event or to repress, not think about it, or wish away the problem.

This study addressed whether a clinical diagnosis of depression is related to the experience of stressful social interactions, negative causal attributions, and coping in adults with mild intellectual disability. Depressed adults with mild ID reported more negative attribution style for stressful social interactions than did the matched nondepressed comparison group. The finding that negative attribution styles are involved in depression among adults with mild ID suggests that cognitive techniques aimed at changing these faulty cognitive processes may be appropriate intervention strategies. The depressed group reported using fewer active coping strategies and more avoidant strategies in stressful social interactions, therefore interventions aimed at helping depressed adults with mild ID utilize more active coping to deal with their social conflicts may be an important strategy for treating depression.