A Survey of Anxiety in Vampires and University Students
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Tutorial: Frank N. Stein #66
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Anxiety is a vague, diffuse and unpleasant feeling of fear and apprehension that can affect individuals for numerous reasons (Santrock & Mitterer, 2006). Symptoms of anxiety are generally divided into two categories, cognitive and somatic. Cognitive symptoms can be negative expectations about an upcoming performance, inability to concentrate, and disruptions in attention where somatic symptoms include elevated heart rate, fast-paced, shallow breathing, and cold, clammy sensations (Post, 2003). People with anxiety are often considered to be people who worry a lot or are overly concerned about specific situations. High degrees of anxiety that make it difficult for a person to function in her everyday life can lead to being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, such as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), specific phobic disorder, or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD; Santrock & Mitterer, 2006). Often, various sources of stress cause high levels of anxiety such as individuals who experience traumatic events may develop specific phobias that lead them to avoid or become extremely anxious about specific events or things. For example, if a person was bitten by a poodle as a child, this could lead to an intense fear of all dogs (Santrock & Mitterer, 2006).

Pre-existing conditions or diseases can also contribute to high levels of anxiety. Individuals with photosensitivity, for example, find going out in the sun highly stressful and are more anxious than non-photosensitive people, as minimal exposure to the sun can cause strong sunburns or make the individual break out into blisters (McKusick, 2005; Rufener, 1992). An extreme form of photosensitivity is found in vampires, where exposure to the sun can cause death (Vampire, n.d.). Most work with vampires has assessed how they cause fear in humans by being re-animated corpses or how they require human blood to survive (Vampire, n.d.); no research to date has examined whether vampires suffer from increased anxiety as a result of their photosensitivity or because of other unknown factors.
We wish to determine whether anxiety levels in vampires are higher than in a sample of university students using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Survey (GADS; Paul, 2001). A score of 70/100 or above indicates high levels of anxiety and a score of 90/100 or above indicates possible anxiety disorders. We hypothesize that vampires will score higher on the GADS indicating that they have a higher level of anxiety than the control group.

Methods

Participants

One hundred vampires (40 females and 60 males: age range from 100-420 years) in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) were randomly chosen from the National Vampire Registry of Canada for the experimental group. All vampires had recently immigrated to Canada from New Zealand. Also, 100 Dalhousie University students (50 females and 50 males: age range from 18-41 years) from Psychology 1011 who signed up for the experiment on the Psychology Dept. webpage. Students received one credit point toward their psychology class mark for participation. Student vampires were asked not to participate.

Apparatus

The GAD survey (Paul, 2001) was used for both groups.

Procedure

Surveys were mailed to the homes of the vampires and were returned to the experimenter by mail. Students were administered the survey in a lab at the Dalhousie Psychology Department.

Surveys were scored blind and the means of scores for each group (vampires and students) as well as the scores of each gender within each group was calculated.
Results

Vampires average score on the GADS was 40/100, and students averaged 80/100 (Table 1). Scores for both female and male vampires were lower than either males or females in the student group. Vampires showed a 50% lower anxiety score overall, with the largest difference being a 65% lower score for male vampires compared to female students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean score (out of 100)</th>
<th>Vampires</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Overall anxiety scores were 50% lower in vampires than in students. Contrary to the hypothesis, the results, as measured by the GADS, indicate that vampires do not have higher levels of anxiety than students and thus do not seem to be negatively affected by their photosensitivity or other issues. It may be that vampires are less anxious than hypothesized or other factors may have contributed to this result. For example, the experimental design was not appropriate. The two groups did not take the survey in the same environment. While vampires took the survey at home, students were in the lab, creating a potentially more stressful situation. In future experiments, both groups should fill out the questionnaire in the same environment. As well, the choice of students as a control group may not have been appropriate. The overall score for students is 80/100, which is above the 70/100 score that indicates high levels of anxiety. Students are often busy with classes, lab reports, or exams and these factors could have increased their anxiety levels above those expected in the general population. It is also possible that the anxiety test was administered during a particularly stressful part of the academic term which
could have inflated the anxiety scores. To avoid exaggerated anxiety scores, future studies could consider using a control group of randomly selected HRM residents who are not students or vampires.

Lifestyle differences not previously considered could also change the expected result. While vampires would die if they were exposed to the sun, perhaps they are well adapted to their situation and have taken several behavioural precautions (such as a 4:00 am curfew) and no longer experience anxiety (Compas et al., 2006). In addition, the vampires were cited as being recent immigrants from New Zealand. It is possible since Canada has less daylight hours than New Zealand that the vampires are less anxious about dying now that they are in Canada.

Because anxiety levels in vampires were lower than in students, the results do not support the hypothesis. Future studies that overcome the potential problems described above could investigate whether this finding was accurate or a result of the flaws in our experimental design.
References


