

Evaluating the Usefulness of Tests and Quizzes for Depression

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Most people have taken some type of personality or career test, and while some are accurate, others are completely off in their results. Depending on your experience with tests, you might even come to the conclusion that they're useless and inaccurate. However, tests are sometimes used in the mental health field to help diagnose and treat patients.

There are all different types of tests for psychological conditions such as depression, and many are reviewed and tested by mental health professionals to ensure accuracy and usefulness. There are even short questionnaires available for screening purposes. However, not all tests have been scrutinized under the same standards.

Russell Hyken, an educational diagnostician at Educational and Psychotherapy Services, LLC, said in an email that it's important for anyone to be discerning when it comes to tests like those that help diagnose depression.

"An assessment that has been well researched, peer reviewed, and has documented accuracy would, of course, be very helpful," Hyken said. "I would proceed with caution when taking a quiz in a magazine or online. It may have an ulterior motive and false positively identify you as depressed."

The Internet makes it easier to access some depression screening tests, although these tests aren't necessarily accurate. For example, Mental Health America's website has a depression screening quiz, but it also has a disclaimer stating that an official diagnosis should be done by a mental health professional. There are 10 questions, all pertaining to symptoms of depression.

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance website also has a screening test for depression. There are 16 questions, and the website has a disclaimer stating that "this screening is not a substitute for professional care." There is also a note at the bottom stating that "this screening form was developed from the Quick Inventory of Depressive Symptomatology Self-Report (QIDS-SR)."

There are more official tests that can be given by mental health professionals, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI and MMPI-2), according to the textbook "Psychological Testing: Principles, Applications, and Issues." The authors state that "the purpose of the MMPI and MMPI-2 is to assist in distinguishing normal from abnormal groups. Specifically, the test was designed to aid in the diagnosis or assessment of the major psychiatric or psychological disorders."

However, tests should not be the only tool used in diagnosis. Hyken said that "a detailed intake interview is needed to determine if what one is experiencing is truly depression or some other issues as minor as 'having the blues' to something as serious as bipolar disorder."

Besides diagnosis, Hyken said that tests can also be used in treatment for depression.

"Well-established instruments are great," Hyken said. "They can give you a baseline measurement of how you feel today. Then, they can be re-administered after treatment to measure improvement. This, along with a good therapist or psychiatrist is an excellent and safe way to measure treatment effectiveness."

Not all professionals use tests in diagnosis and treatment.

"Some do not use assessments because they are not aware they exist, may be too costly, or feel they are not relevant to the situation," Hyken said.

In my own personal experience with depression, I don't recall ever having an actual paper or computer test to determine if I have depression. In my case, professionals just conducted interviews to find out that I had depression.

In fact, interviews are considered a psychological test, since they can unearth answers just like physical tests, except that in the case of interviews the test is verbal and sometimes unstructured. However, I have always been curious about what my results would be for different official psychological tests like the MMPI.

What is your experience with testing for depression, or taking tests as part of treatment for depression? Do you think they are useful or not

necessary?

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