

# The Relationship Between Bipolar Disorder and Financial Difficulties: A Qualitative Examination of Patient's Views

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## Introduction

- During a manic phase, individuals with bipolar disorder are at high risk for behaving impulsively (Muhtadie et al., 2014)
- Cheema et al. (2015) found that bipolar disorder patients have poorer financial management skills.
- Richardson et al. (2013) meta-analysis found those with depression more than twice as likely to be in debt.
- Barnes et al. (2016) economic hardships may act “as the final straw to trigger self-harm”.
- No research has looked at the perceived impact of debt and financial difficulties in bipolar disorder specifically (Richardson et al., 2013).

## Objective

The present study examined whether and how those with bipolar disorder believe their finances and mental health to be related using thematic analysis.



## Method

### Participants

- Participants diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder (type I, type II or unspecified) were invited by their clinician within a secondary care mental health service.

### Procedures

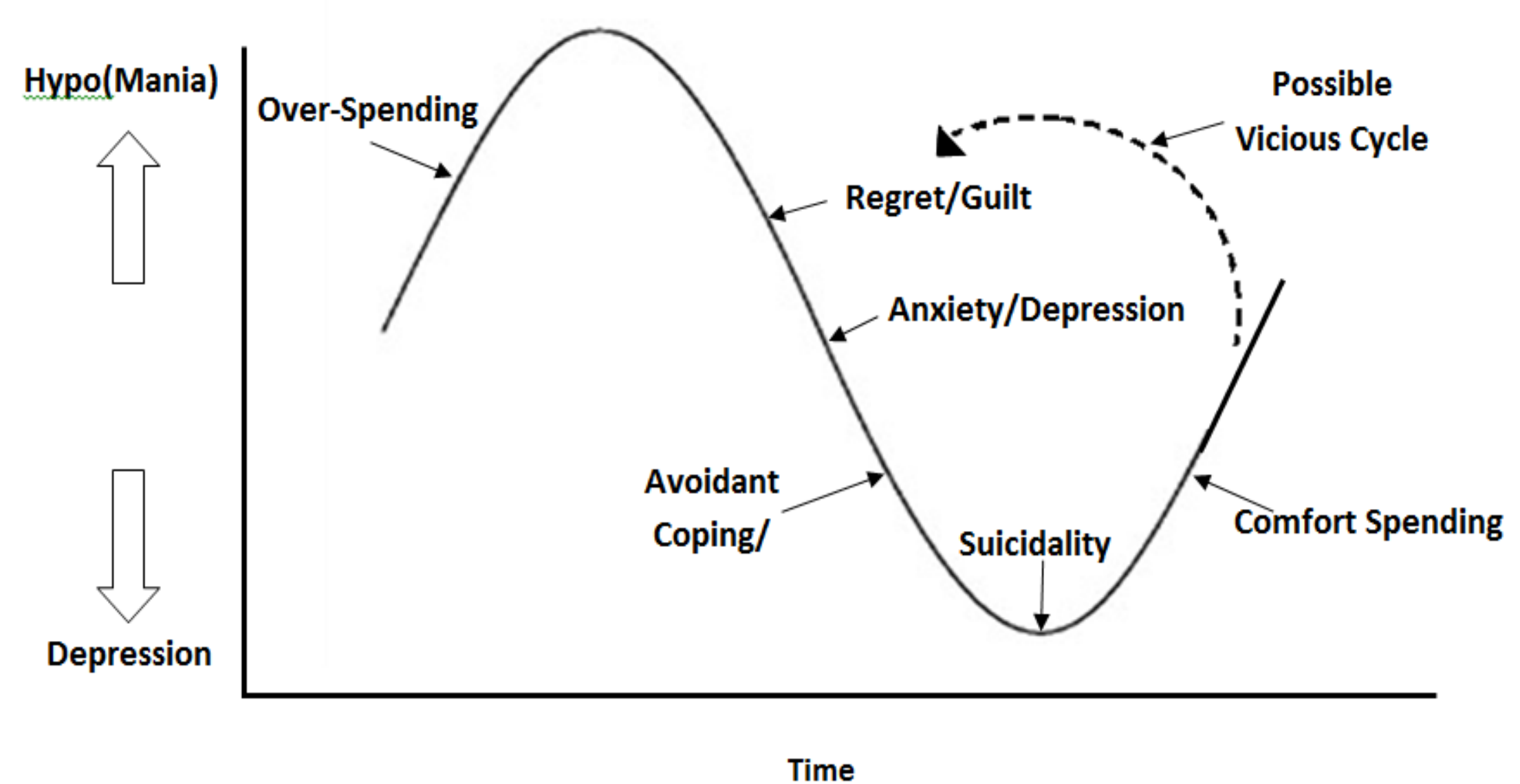
- 44 participants responded to open-ended questions asking how their mental health has affected their finances and vice versa.
- Six participants were selected at random and invited to take part in a focus group to discuss the impact of debt on their mental health.

### Thematic analysis

- The focus group recording was transcribed and two reviewers thematically analysed this and the qualitative question answers. This identified **seven main themes and three subthemes**.

## Results

Themes	Quotes
<b>1. Overspending</b> <b>a. Impulse Shopping</b> <b>b. Excessive Generosity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Impulsive purchases... will spend all that I have when I am manic or hypo-manic.”</li><li>“I became high and gave away all my savings to charity 4 years ago.”</li></ul>
<b>2. Anxiety/Depression</b> <b>a. Suicidality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“The realisation of debt can trigger a depressive bout.”</li><li>“The very reason I tried to commit suicide 3 years ago.”</li></ul>
<b>3. Regret/Guilt</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Regret about overspending – “What made me buy these things!?”</li></ul>
<b>4. Poor Planning/Avoidant Coping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Prone to burying head in the sand, ignoring demands for payments.”</li></ul>
<b>5. Vicious Cycle</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“It’s a vicious cycle. I realise I’m spending and putting my family in financial stress and leads to larger depression. This is then leads to comfort spending again.”</li></ul>
<b>6. Poor Employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Affected work and the amount I earn. Had to take an £8000 pay cut to support positive mental health.”</li></ul>
<b>7. Comfort Spending</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“During down periods, I essentially comfort spend.”</li></ul>



Timeline of the proposed themes in line with a bipolar disorder mood cycle

## Conclusion

- The present findings highlight that financial difficulties may be an important issue for those with bipolar disorder.
- Psychological mechanisms such as impulsivity and avoidance might be tackled by psychological therapies.

## References

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