

Health Anxiety in Children: Development and Psychometric Properties of the Childhood Illness Attitude Scales

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DOI: 10.1080/16506070310014691

Publication Frequency: 4 issues per year

- **Published in:**  [Cognitive Behaviour Therapy](#), Volume [32](#), Issue [4](#) November 2003 ,

Abstract

The course of severe anxiety surrounding health issues is unknown. The available literature suggests that adults who are overly anxious about health issues often interpret or misinterpret their bodily signs and symptoms to be indicative of a serious illness. The construct of health anxiety has not been examined in children and, to date, there has not been an instrument developed for this purpose. The Illness Attitude Scales is one of the most commonly used instruments for evaluating fears, beliefs, and attitudes that are associated with hypochondriasis and abnormal illness behaviour in adults. We sought to adapt the Illness Attitude Scales for use with children ages 8-15 years. The adapted Illness Attitude Scales was renamed the Childhood Illness Attitude Scales. Revisions to the adult version consisted of simplification of language, revision of Likert scale (i.e. 5-point to 3-point scale), and the addition of 7 questions to evaluate the role parents/guardians play in facilitating medical attention or treatment. Correlations between Childhood Illness Attitude Scales total scores and other self-report measures were supportive of the construct-related validity of the Childhood Illness Attitude Scales and suggested that it is a useful measure of health anxiety in school-age children. Practical and theoretical implications of the present results are discussed.

Keywords: children; health anxiety; hypochondriasis; illness behaviour; assessment; psychometric; Childhood Illness Attitude Scales