



Is Anxiety Sensitivity a Predictor of PTSD in Children and Adolescents?

Kiliç, E.Z., Kiliç, C., & Yilmaz, S. (2008). Is anxiety sensitivity a predictor of PTSD in children and adolescents? *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 65(1), 81-86. doi: 10.1016/j.jpsychores.2008.02.013



Civilian-Focused
Article



81 Turkish children exposed to an earthquake 5 years prior and 87 comparison children (no earthquake or trauma exposure) completed a survey of anxiety sensitivity, trait and state anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms. Researchers investigated how anxiety sensitivity may be a vulnerability factor in the development of PTSD. Children exposed and not exposed to an earthquake did not differ on anxiety sensitivity, depression, anxiety, or PTSD scores. However, trait anxiety and anxiety sensitivity predicted PTSD symptoms above and beyond the effect of trait anxiety.

Key Findings:

- Turkish children who experienced an earthquake 5 years prior did not differ from those who did not experience the earthquake.
- Trauma-exposed children with more severe PTSD symptoms had higher anxiety sensitivity, depression, and anxiety scores compared to those with less severe PTSD.
- Anxiety sensitivity and trait anxiety, but not state anxiety or depression scores, predicted PTSD symptoms.
- Trait anxiety and anxiety sensitivity were moderately related ($r=.32$.)

Implications for Programs:

- Programs working with children with trauma exposure and/or PTSD symptoms could consider that some of those children may be highly anxiety sensitive.
- Programs could tailor their activities and curricula to minimize potentially anxiety provoking situations for these youth.
- Programs could develop and offer fun, engaging activities for children and gently encourage them to try previously-avoided anxiety provoking situations.
- Programs could teach children relaxation techniques (e.g., deep breathing, imagery) and encourage regular physical exercise.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could support the creation and evaluation of a range of supports for children who have experienced traumatic events.
- Policies could suggest funding for the development of parenting classes to help Service members and partners/spouses; these classes could teach couples effective parenting strategies for their children, especially in the aftermath of trauma exposure.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could use a larger sample size which would allow for additional analyses.
- Additional studies could measure mental health and anxiety sensitivity prior to a trauma to allow more causal conclusions to be drawn.

Background Information

Methodology:

- Children in Turkish metropolitan households who experienced an earthquake in 1999 (5 years prior) in were randomly selected and invited to participate in this study. Age- and gender-matched children from that area who were not exposed to the earthquake who were also invited to participate.
- All children were given written measures of childhood anxiety, depression, PTSD, anxiety sensitivity and demographic variables.
- T-tests compared the two groups on mental health. Correlation coefficients examined the relationships among the variables. Linear regression examined the relationship between PTSD scores and other demographic and clinical variables.

Participants:

- 81 Turkish children (8-15 years old, 51% girls) exposed to an earthquake participated.
- 87 Turkish children (8-15 years old, 51% girls) who were not exposed to the earthquake or other traumatic experiences were the control group.
- Mean age=11.20 (SD=2.20) years.
- No other demographic information was presented.

Limitations:

- The small sample size precluded factor analyses which might provide additional information about how anxiety sensitivity is related to PTSD.
- The data is cross-sectional and no causal conclusions are possible.
- As the sample is Turkish, it is unknown how these results generalize to U. S. military youth.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★★
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★★★
Research Methods					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	★★★★★
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★★★
Limitations					Quality Rating:
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)	★★★★★
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★★★
Implications					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	N/A
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★★★