Relationships among trait anxiety, anxiety sensitivity and anxiety symptoms in a community sample of children from 8 to 12.

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Theoretical Background

- High prevalence of anxiety in children and adolescents (Beesdo et al, 2009).
- Vulnerability to anxiety would involve high levels of anxiety sensitivity (AS):
  - AS refers to the fear of behaviours and sensations associated with the experience of anxiety based on the belief that anxiety symptoms have harmful consequences (Cox et al, 1999; McNally, 2002);
  - Increased risk for panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, PTSD, depression, health anxiety, chronic pain, and substance use disorder (Watts & Stewart, 2009).
- Aims of the study:
  - Examine the relations between AS, trait anxiety (TA), and six dimensions of anxiety (separation anxiety, social anxiety, generalised anxiety, panic symptoms, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, and depresssive symptoms) in children aged 8-12.
  - Examine whether these factors can be predictive of behavioural and emotional difficulties reported by their parents → Questionnaire-based study and correlation/regression analyses.

Methods

Participants: 100 children (44 girls; M_age: 10.3y, SD: 1.5) recruited in collaborating primary schools.

Measures:
- Children Anxiety Sensitivity Inventory - CASI (Silverman et al, 2010).
- Spielberger Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children - STAI-C (Spielberger, 1973).
- Revised Children’s Anxiety and Depression Scale – RCADS (Chorpita et al, 2005).

Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASI</td>
<td>19.7</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>STAI-C</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCADS</td>
<td>33.5</td>
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<td>108</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBCL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>- Externalizing</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
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<td>43</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Analyses

Correlational analyses:
- The CASI score was correlated to all the subscales of the RCADS and to 6 dimensions of the CBCL.
- The STAI-C were not correlated to the CASI nor to the RCADS and the CBCL.

Linear regressions (backward elimination) evidenced one-variable model involving the CASI as better predictor of:
- RCADS global score: F(1,91)=22.721, p <.001.
- Internalizing problems at the CBCL: F(1,91)=5.397, p=.022.
- Externalizing problems at the CBCL: F(1,91)=4.527, p=.036.

Discussion:

Anxiety sensitivity may mediate the development of emotional distress in children prone to attend anxiety symptoms
- Children reporting high AS levels are more prone to experience panic symptoms but also separation anxiety, social anxiety, obsessive-compulsive symptoms and dysphoric feelings.
- High level of AS is predictive to internalizing but also externalizing difficulties reported by parents.


References