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## Factor structure of the childhood anxiety sensitivity index

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### Abstract

We developed various factor models of the Childhood Anxiety Sensitivity Index [Silverman, W. K., Fleisig, W., Rabian, B. & Peterson, R. A. (1991). Childhood anxiety sensitivity index. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 20, 162-168] and tested the goodness of fit of the models in an independent sample. Of primary interest was to examine the question that characterized the factor analytic studies conducted on the adult version of the anxiety sensitivity index, i.e. the ASI [Reiss, S., Peterson, R. A., Gursky, D. M. & McNally, R. J. (1986). Anxiety sensitivity, anxiety frequency and the prediction of fearfulness. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 24, 1-8]: is anxiety sensitivity in children a unidimensional construct, an orthogonal multidimensional construct, or a hierarchical construct? Two independent samples (a clinic sample and a nonclinical sample) were used for development and replication of the factor models. The clinic sample consisted of 258 children (105 girls and 153 boys) who presented to a child anxiety disorders specialty clinic. The unselected, nonclinic sample consisted of 249 children (122 girls and 127 boys) enrolled in an elementary school. The results provided strong empirical support for a hierarchical multidimensional model with either three or four first-order factors. The two factors that emerged that appeared to be robust were *Physical Concerns* and *Mental Incapacitation Concerns*. What remains unresolved is whether *Control* of anxiety symptoms and *Social Concerns* are to be differentiated (as in the hierarchical model with four first-order factors) or not (as in the hierarchical model with three first-order factors). In addition to discussing this issue, the convergence of the present study's findings with past findings obtained with the ASI is discussed. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

There has been considerable controversy on the issue of the factor structure of the Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI) (Reiss, Peterson, Gursky & McNally, 1986), a measure that was designed to assess adults' fears of a variety of anxiety symptoms, in accordance with the expectancy theory of anxiety of Reiss (1991). The two most debated, controversial factor models have been the unidimensional model, which received empirical support by Reiss et al. (1986) and initially by Taylor, Koch and Crockett (1991) and Taylor, Koch, McNally and Crockett (1992) and the multidimensional model of four orthogonal factors, which received empirical support by Peterson and Heilbronner (1987) and Telch, Shermis and Lucas (1989).

Between these two models is a third model, describing a multidimensional structure of three or four oblique factors with substantial factor intercorrelations. This model can resolve the controversy between the advocates of the first two because the oblique structure points to a single, higher-order factor. Cox, Parker and Swinson (1996) tested the various proposed models by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). They found strong support for the third model with four oblique factors.

Theorists and investigators recently have proposed a more specific, hierarchical version of the Cox et al. (1996) model; that is, a higher-order model containing the first-order factors and a single second-order factor (e.g. Lilienfeld, Turner & Jacob, 1993; Taylor, Koch, Woody & McLean, 1996; Zinbarg, Barlow & Brown, 1997; Taylor & Cox, 1998a,b; Taylor & Fedoroff 1999). Initial empirical support for this model was provided by Zinbarg et al. (1997) using a sample of adult outpatients who were referred to an anxiety disorders clinic ( $N = 432$ ). Zinbarg et al. (1997) found that a model with three oblique first-order factors and one single second-order factor provided the best fit to their data. Because all but one of the ASI items had second-order factor loadings  $> 0.30$ , one can use the total scale as a satisfactory representation of the second-order factor. Hence, Zinbarg et al.'s hierarchical model consists of a general factor 'anxiety sensitivity' (in accordance with the unidimensional model) and three specific factors (in accordance with the multidimensional model).

Recent investigations sampling different populations to those used by Zinbarg et al. have obtained correlated factors similar to those reported by Zinbarg et al. (1997), providing further support for the hierarchical model (e.g. Taylor et al., 1996; Stewart, Taylor & Baker, 1997). In Stewart et al. (1997), for example, participants ( $N = 818$ ) were recruited through a university undergraduate student subject pool. Stewart et al. (1997) conducted a hierarchic analysis which yielded Schmid–Leiman results that were similar to those reported by Zinbarg et al. (1997).

The aim of the present study was to develop various factor models of the child form of the Anxiety Sensitivity Index, the Childhood Anxiety Sensitivity Index (CASI; Silverman, Fleisig, Rabian & Peterson, 1991) and to test the goodness of fit of the model-defined groupings of the items and presence or absence of correlations among the factors. As far as we aware, this is the first factor analytic study on the CASI to appear in the published research literature.

It is timely to investigate the CASI's factor structure given the increased usage of this measure in childhood anxiety research studies and the growing, positive evidence for its utility in various contexts (see Silverman & Weems, 1999, for a review). Specifically, the CASI has been found to possess satisfactory reliability and validity (Silverman et al., 1991), to predict variance beyond that explained by trait anxiety in both younger and older children (Weems,

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