

Is comorbidity in the eating disorders related to perceptions of parenting? Criterion validity of the revised Young Parenting Inventory

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Abstract

Background: Recent studies support the reliability and validity of the Young Parenting Inventory-Revised (YPI-R) and its use in investigating the role of parenting in the aetiology and maintenance of eating pathology. However, criterion validity has yet to be fully established. To investigate one aspect of criterion validity, this study examines the association between parenting and comorbid problems in the eating disorders (including general psychopathology and impulsivity).

Method: The participants were 124 women with eating disorders. They completed the YPI-R and the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI; a measure of general psychopathology). They were also interviewed about their use of a number of impulsive behaviours.

Results: YPI-R scales were significant predictors of one of the nine BSI scales, and distinguished those patients who did or did not use specific impulsive behaviours.

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Discussion: The criterion validity of the YPI-R is partially supported with regards to general psychopathology and impulsivity. The findings highlight the specificity of the parenting styles measured by the YPI-R, and the need for further research using this tool.

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Existing measures of family functioning consistently differentiate eating-disordered women from non-eating-disordered women, with poorer levels of family functioning found in eating-disordered groups (e.g., Hodges, Cochrane, & Brewerton, 1998; Leung, Thomas, & Waller, 2000; Waller, Calam, & Slade, 1988; Waller, Slade, & Calam, 1990). However, the specificity of existing measures is poor. First, levels of family functioning often fail to predict the severity of eating disorders (e.g., Calam & Slade, 1987; Scaf-McIver & Thompson, 1989; Waller, 1994; Williams, Chamove, & Millar, 1990). Second, the measures used in different studies address different constructs, potentially explaining why those studies do not yield consistent results. Finally, although eating-disordered patients report higher levels of adverse parenting experiences, this is also the case for subjects with other psychiatric conditions. This finding suggests that family functioning has poor specificity for eating pathology, and limits investigation into the pathways by which family functioning might influence the development and maintenance of eating disorders.

A clinically useful measure of perceived parenting in the eating disorders is likely to be one that addresses the cognitive structures that underpin those problems and that can account for comorbidity in such cases. Recent clinical and research evidence suggests that negative core beliefs play a critical role in the development and maintenance of eating disorders (Cooper, 1997; Leung, Waller, & Thomas, 1999), indicating that this aspect of cognitive content merits further attention. Negative core beliefs are unconditional beliefs about the self, the world or others. The Young Parenting Inventory (YPI; Young, 1999) is a measure of perceived parenting, designed to identify the potential origins of those negative core beliefs, suggesting that it might be a more informative measure than other indices of family function.

Factor analysis of the YPI has led to the development of a shorter version of the scale—the YPI-R (Sheffield, Waller, Emanuelli, Murray, & Meyer, *in press*). The YPI-R consists of 37 of the original 72 items of the YPI, making up nine scales reflecting perceived parenting. Each scale is rated separately for mothers and fathers. At this preliminary stage in validation, the YPI-R scales demonstrate good test–retest reliability and adequate internal consistency (Sheffield et al., *in press*). Significant and clinically meaningful correlations between some YPI-R scales and some negative core beliefs also support the construct validity of the YPI-R (Sheffield et al., *in press*). Further support for construct validity is demonstrated in a study by Emanuelli, Sheffield, Waller, Meyer, and Lacey (*in preparation*), which found that YPI-R scales predicted levels of eating pathology and that this relationship was mediated by core beliefs.

To summarise, preliminary validation studies on non-clinical and eating-disordered samples support the reliability and validity of the YPI-R. However, studies to date have only used non-clinical samples, and criterion and discriminant validity have yet to be established. In particular, it is not known whether parenting is relevant to comorbid behaviours (e.g., impulsivity) or to more general psychopathology (e.g., anxiety and depression) in the eating disorders. This is clearly an area for investigation, given the evidence that negative core beliefs might also play an integral role in depression (e.g., Riso et al., 2003;

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