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Anxiety in young children: A randomised controlled trial of a new cognitive-behaviourally based parenting intervention

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Research Question: how effective is a new parentally focussed intervention for anxiety in young children?

Anxiety in childhood is increasingly recognised as deleterious, both in the short-term and in the long-term, carrying with it increased risk of adult anxiety disorders, depression, suicide, substance misuse and many other difficulties. Anxiety in childhood is also very common; although prevalence estimates vary it is widely held to be the most common psychological disorder of childhood. Despite this, a recent systematic review of well-evaluated treatments for anxiety in childhood returned no interventions that were directly applicable to younger children.

The primary aim of our study is to conduct a randomised controlled investigation of a new treatment for anxiety in children less than ten.

The Intervention

The new intervention is cognitive-behaviourally based and focuses on manipulating a number of parenting practices that are hypothesised to be associated with child anxiety. In particular, parents are taught skills for managing their children's difficult behaviours in a calm and consistent fashion. They are also introduced to some basic therapeutic skills for helping their children to manage and challenge their worries and fears. The intervention is delivered weekly for 2 hours, to small groups of parents, over a 10 week period.

The study is funded by the MRC, has ethical approval and is running in the UK MHRN North West Hub—currently in Central Manchester & Manchester Children's Hospital Trust.

72 families will be included—36 will receive the new intervention whilst 36 will be monitored on a waiting list for 10 weeks before receiving treatment as usual.

Evaluations before, after and 12 months after treatment will allow evaluation of its efficacy and the investigation of related hypotheses.

For more information on this project please contact: sam.cartwright-hatton@manchester.ac.uk

