

Topics and Characteristics of Intrusive Thoughts among Children and Adolescents

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Abstract

The present study explores intrusive thoughts of children and adolescents. In the first stage 133 questionnaires were completed by 12 to 17 year-old children and adolescents attending a public secondary high-school. Meaningful intrusive thoughts were common. However, they caused greater discomfort to children and adolescents who reported more OC or anxiety symptoms. Further, higher frequency of intrusive thoughts and stronger resistance of them were more specific to thoughts related to OC symptoms. Greater report of OC symptoms was also associated with greater use of the following thought control strategies: social, worry, punishment and re-appraisals. However, only social strategies (perhaps represented by reassurance seeking) were associated with OC symptoms beyond anxiety symptoms. In the second stage, 18 mental health experts were asked to rate the level of obsessiveness of 30 intrusive thoughts reported by the children in the first part. Experts differentiated between intrusive thoughts of children and adolescents with high report of OC symptoms and those with low or medium report of OC symptoms. Neither experts' own description nor objective analysis could explain which characteristics of the intrusive thoughts were relevant to the experts' relative success. Topic analysis contributed some clue to possible differences, but experts' success remains unexplained and awaits further research