

The effect of self control on the link between Illness` perception and anxiety among children who suffer from Epilepsy, and the appearance of the illness in their drawings

By: Maya Alshech, MA, the Graduate School of Creative Art Therapies, University of Haifa.

Supervised by: Prof. Rachel Lev-Wiesel, Dr. Liat Hamama, Bob Shapell School of Social Work, Tel-Aviv University.

Epilepsy is a neurological chronic disorder that usually erupts in childhood. It involves psychosocial difficulties, and is highly correlated with anxiety.

"Illness cognition" is the patient's subjective appraisal of its illness severity, and is known to have a high correlation to anxiety. "Self-control skills" are reported in literature as a resource that can reduce anxiety levels. This research examined whether self-control skills can moderate the correlation between severe illness cognition and high levels of anxiety among epileptic children.

This research also examined whether illness cognition can be identified through the Self-Drawing Test, a projective test reflecting content suppressed by the subject.

The sample included 30 epileptic children, aged 7 to 13, who were treated in Assaf Harofeh Medical Center. The participants completed a questionnaire regarding demographics, anxiety, self-control skills and Illness Cognition measures. They also completed a Self-Drawing Test in two steps: a present self-figure drawing, and a retroactive self-figure drawing prior to the onset of the disease.

Findings showed positive correlation between illness cognition and levels of anxiety among the patients. Moreover, this pattern maintained among low self-control skills subjects, while it weakened among subjects with high self control skills. The self-figure drawings revealed that the character's hair position may serve as an indicator of the subject's anxiety.

The study's limitations include the small sample size and the social desirability bias as a result of self-report questionnaires. Also, participants were under medical treatment, which could influence their report.

Continuing research may re-conduct the method on a larger sample. Also, integrating environmental contexts is essential for broadening the knowledge of epilepsy's implications. Additionally, the Self-Drawing Test should be further studied as an expression tool for epileptic children.

Keywords: Epilepsy, children, chronic illness, anxiety, self-control, self-control skills, illness cognition, projective test, self-figure drawings, DAP.

Corresponding author: Maya Alshech, Email: maya2409@gmail.com