Research Article

Self-efficacy in Infant Care Scale: Revision and further psychometric testing

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Abstract

Maternal self-efficacy is an important factor in parenting behaviors and skills. In order to assess maternal self-efficacy in infant care, a solid measure is needed. The integrity of the assessment of self-efficacy in infant care depends upon whether or not an instrument possesses proper measurement properties. The purpose of this study was to revise the scale items and examine the further psychometric properties of the Self-efficacy in Infant Care Scale. Using a sample of 235 Thai mothers, the revised Scale, with 44 items, was found to have internal consistency and test-retest reliability values of 0.96 and 0.93, respectively. A confirmatory factor analysis supported the hypothesized structure. Also, the revised Scale was found to be correlated with a measure of a theoretically related construct; that is, the Parenting Stress Index/Short Form. The psychometric testing results suggest that the revised Scale can be used as an assessment tool for both research and clinical purposes.

Key words

infant care, instrument development, psychometric testing, self-efficacy, Thailand.

INTRODUCTION

Infants are defenseless and dependent beings. Skilful and responsive caregivers are important during the early stages of parenting. In Thai society, the most significant primary caregiver of infants is the mother. Despite the fact that the number of mothers who are working outside the home has been increasing, a national survey has reported that 60.7% of Thai children who are <2 years of age have their own mother as their primary caregiver (National Statistical Office, 2004). Thus, these mothers are expected to be able to provide optimal care for their infant.

To achieve optimal infant care, a mother needs to have adequate self-efficacy in infant care. Theoretically, the perceptions of parental self-efficacy for certain tasks will predict the intended parenting behavior (Sanders & Woolley, 2005). Previous studies have supported self-efficacy in parenting, or taking care of infants and children, as the primary means through which individuals are able to transform a poor provision of care into nurturing care that contributes to desired child outcomes. A comprehensive review by Jones and Prinz (2005) reported a strong association between parental self-efficacy and parenting competence (defined as the parenting behaviors, skills, and strategies that are used to promote positive and adaptive child development and outcomes), psychological functioning of parents (including a linkage to depression, stress, role satisfaction, and coping), and child adjustment (e.g. child behavior, socio-emotional functioning, and achievement at school). The study also showed evidence to support parental self-efficacy as an indicator of successful parent training programs. More recent studies also have reported the positive effects of interventions that promote parental self-efficacy on various aspects of parenting and child outcomes; for example, parental distress (Hayes et al., 2008), breast-feeding (Poungkaew N, 2005, unpubl. data; Nichols et al., 2009), sleeping and eating in children (Barlow et al., 2006), and problematic behavior in children (Hayes et al., 2008). Thus, it may be concluded that one avenue to successful parenting is through the elevation of maternal self-efficacy.

In order to assess maternal self-efficacy in infant care, a robust measure is needed. The measurement of self-efficacy beliefs related to infant care activities can be used as a pretest and post-test evaluation to identify if an intervention, implemented to strengthen the efficacy beliefs, works.

Conceptual basis and development of the Self-efficacy in Infant Care Scale

Related literature about the essential care for infants and Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory were used as a conceptual framework for the development of the Self-efficacy in Infant Care Scale (SICS). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as one’s belief of how competently and effectively one can carry out a designated task and he identified self-efficacy as a core construct that mediates between knowledge and behavior. In the case of a mother, having only knowledge about infant care is not adequate to influence her actions.