INFORMATION POINT:

Construct validity

Construct validity is the degree to which an instrument or tool measures the theory or hypothesis under investigation.

For any new instrument we must demonstrate the reliability and validity of the instrument for it to be worthy of widespread use. There are a number of types of validity, discussed in more detail by Bowling (1995) and Oppenheim (1992), but perhaps the most difficult to demonstrate is construct validity.

Construct validity is the ability of an instrument to confirm expected hypotheses. For example, suppose we have an instrument that is claimed to measure 'health'. We would then expect that those who are ill, of lower social class and frequent visitors to their GP to gain scores indicating worse health than individuals who are well, in a higher social class and infrequently visit their GP. Thus, validation of the instrument involves ensuring that it can discriminate between such groups. In the preceding paper the author was investigating the validity of a pain scale, and investigated construct validity of the scale by measuring pain before and after analgesia. It seems reasonable to assume that, if the scale is measuring pain, it should indicate less pain after analgesia.

Construct validity is sometimes confused with criterion validity, which refers to the ability of the instrument to correspond with other measures. Thus, we could establish criterion validity of a new pain scale by comparing its results with those of an established pain instrument. This is only useful if we can be sure that the established instrument does indeed measure pain – that is it has construct validity.

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Further reading

Bowling A. (1995) *Measuring disease.* Open University Press, Buckingham.

Oppenheim A.N. (1992) *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement.* 2nd edition. Pinter, London.