



Cross-informant ratings of social competence in children and adolescents

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Abstract

The cross-informant ratings of social competence displayed by children and adolescents were investigated in a meta-analytic study. Effect sizes from 74 studies containing the ratings of the social competence of children and adolescents from at least two different informants were included in this meta-analysis. Results indicated that studies investigating the correspondence of the child or adolescent's own report with the report of parent, teacher, or peer informants had average effect sizes that were small in magnitude. The average effect sizes of other types of cross-informant pairs (e.g., parent–teacher) were moderate in magnitude, with teachers and peers demonstrating the greatest correspondence. Potential moderators (e.g., the type of measure completed by the informants, the age and gender of the target child or adolescent, and the location of the assessment) were also examined. These results demonstrate the importance of selecting carefully informants when evaluating the social competence of children and adolescents.

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1. Introduction

The development of social competence in children and adolescents has been related closely to positive outcomes in later life (e.g., [Galejs & Stockdale, 1982](#)). As a result, evaluating the consistency of cross-informant ratings when assessing social competence exhibited by children and adolescents may be important for the promotion and evaluation of effective interventions focused on improving social

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competence across settings. Few attempts, however, have been made to examine the cross-informant ratings of social competence. Cross-informant ratings of emotional and behavioral functioning in children and adolescents have been examined thoroughly (Achenbach, McConaughy, & Howell, 1987; Duhig, Renk, Epstein, & Phares, 2000). In contrast, cross-informant ratings of the social competence exhibited by children and adolescents often have been treated as an aside. Such ratings have not been investigated directly in many cases. As a result, a meta-analytic study was conducted to describe the correspondence of cross informants in their ratings of the social competence exhibited by children and adolescents.

2. Cross-informant ratings of social competence

The benefits and difficulties of dealing with multiple informants, as discussed by Achenbach et al. (1987), have become apparent in clinical work and research with children, adolescents, and families. When information from multiple sources is integrated, a more complete picture of an individual can be constructed. Achenbach et al. suggested that it is essential to preserve the contributions of different informants, even if their reports are not correlated highly. Cross-informant ratings have provided valuable information in the examination of other areas of childhood functioning, such as in the emotional and behavioral functioning of children and adolescents. As a result, the contributions of multiple cross-informants likely will provide valuable information regarding the social competence of children and adolescents.

Although cross-informant reports may correlate modestly, each informant may have differing experiences with the various types of characteristics and behaviors displayed by children and adolescents. In fact, Achenbach et al. (1987) found that informants who played similar roles (e.g., mothers and fathers) tended to show higher levels of agreement in their ratings of the emotional and behavioral problems of children and adolescents than did informants who played different roles (e.g., teachers and peers). This finding may apply to cross-informant ratings of social competence as well. For example, mothers' ratings of children's task-oriented behaviors have been correlated positively with fathers' ratings of capable, leadership, and active behaviors with peers (Galejs & Stockdale, 1982).

Individual studies examining the agreement of cross informants, other than that of mothers and fathers, have found conflicting patterns of results, however. For example, parents' ratings of the social competence exhibited by their children tended to not correspond with that of other sources of information (Schneider & Byrne, 1989). Furthermore, Steele, Forehand, and Devine (1996) reported that teachers and adolescents did not differ in their ratings of adolescent social competence, whereas mothers had higher ratings than did adolescents. In contrast, Galejs and Stockdale (1982) reported that teachers' reports of social competence corresponded more with those of parents rather than with those of peers. To provide an overall picture of these different findings, the current meta-analysis attempted to clarify the degree of correspondence in the ratings of social competence exhibited by children and adolescents when provided by different informants.

In general, it has been suggested that researchers combine data from multiple informants. This approach has proven to be more reliable than using information from a single data source (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Furthermore, this approach may be particularly useful for the construct of social competence, as it has been defined in many different ways. One primary component of social

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