

Chapter 17

PARENT AND TEACHER AGREEMENT ON EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN WITH READING PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate parent and teacher agreement on emotional and behavioral problems of children with reading problems. This study was conducted in Milopotamos Province, in the municipality of Rethimnon, in Crete, where many behavioral problems in boys including school drop-out, violence and rule-breaking have been reported. Reading tests were given to 318 students from 18 schools from third and fourth grade (8+ to -10). Eighty schoolchildren, whose reading performance was under 25% of distribution rates, comprised the group of schoolchildren with reading problems. Their parents (N=65) and teachers (N=79) assessed each child using the Greek parent and teacher version of the Child Behavior Checklist respectively. Results revealed higher correlation on narrow and broad scales for externalizing problems than internalizing and total problems. High level of agreement is important for two reasons: first, because it maximizes parents' acceptance of children's difficulties and consequently this maximizes the agreement for appropriate intervention. Second, it is necessary in the planning of intervention programs at the early stages of a child's academic development in order to reduce the incidents of students dropping out of school and perhaps to diminish the increasing rate of violence and rule-breaking activity in the area of Milopotamos.

Keywords: reading problems, internalizing problems, externalizing problems, parent – teacher agreement, intervention programs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parent and teacher necessity of information utilization on emotional and behavioral problems has long been pointed out (Rutter, Tizard, & Whitmore, 1970). Researchers and educators rely heavily on parents' and teachers' ratings of children's emotional and behavioral problems, because young children are not able to provide reliable information about their behavior. There are different perceptions between parents and teachers regarding children's behavioral problems and this is due to the different settings, in which such behavior is exhibited. For example, one child may exhibit extreme anxiety at school but not at home, and vice versa. Another reason for the different perceptions is due to various cultural beliefs about which behavior is considered appropriate either at home or at school. Nevertheless, if parents and teachers agree that "specific" behaviors have arisen in both settings, it seems that this behavior is serious and an intervention is needed.

Children's behavior evaluation is accomplished through questionnaires constructed by Achenbach (1993), which have been standardized in many countries. The parent and teacher complement of Achenbach's questionnaires enable the possibility of comparing the evaluation results. Emotional and behavior problems constitute two broad dimensions, being equal to internalizing and externalizing behavior problems.

Although there is a plethora of studies concerning emotional and behavioral problems, fewer studies have been conducted to exploring parent – teacher agreement on this field. Most of the studies conducted thus far in different countries and different age groups indicate that parents rate more internalizing and externalizing problems than teachers (Cai, Kaiser, & Hancock, 2004; Deng, Liu, & Roosa, 2004; Satake, Yoshida, Yamashita, Kinukawa, & Takagishi, 2003), and only a few studies indicate teachers rate more problems than parents

(e.g. Handwerk & Marshall, 1998; Shin, Nhan, Crittenden, Valenti, & Hong, 2008). In Greece, Roussos and colleagues (1999), found in a large random community sample from 1200 schoolchildren (6-12 years old) that Greek parents consider their children more aggressive, delinquent, anxious and depressed than children of American parents. In the same study, Greek teachers agreed with Greek parents that their schoolchildren are more anxious and depressed at school.

2. BACKGROUND

The magnitude of parent and teacher agreement on internalizing and externalizing problems has been low to moderate (Achenbach, McConaughy, & Howell, 1987; Satake et al., 2003; Stanger & Lewis, 1993). The agreement with regard to externalizing problems fluctuates between moderate to high and is higher for children aged 6–11 than for adolescents (Achenbach et al., 1987). These problems are visible, serious, and easier to determine and maybe cause trouble to adults. On the contrary, the agreement on internalizing problems tends to be low, because they may not often be visible and the adults may not be aware of them. Most of these studies investigating parent-teacher agreement on internalizing and externalizing problems use samples from the general population and only a few use selective samples, such as schoolchildren with reading or learning problems.

The relation between learning or reading problems and emotional problems has long been proven in schoolchildren (for a review see Arnold et al., 2005; Beitchman & Young, 1997; Carroll, Maughan, Goodman, & Meltzer, 2005; Hinshaw, 1992; McGee, Williams, Share, Anderson, & Silva, 1986; Prior, Smart, Sanson, & Oberklaid, 1999; Rutter, et al., 1970; Smart, Sanson, & Prior, 1996; Willcutt & Pennington, 2000). Even though there are so many studies in this field, only a few studies investigate parent – teacher agreement.

The first study concerned with the relation between reading difficulties and emotional and behavior problems was conducted by Rutter and his colleagues (Rutter, et al., 1970). In this study, parent and teacher agreement was low but statistically significant. The closest agreement was concerned with antisocial characteristics, such as stealing and disobedience. On the contrary, the lowest levels of agreement were neurotic characteristics, such as worries, twitches, irritability, misery, fear and fussiness (Rutter et al., 1970). This study designated the necessity of utilizing parent and teacher information on behavior assessment.

The results tend to be the same in other studies using selective samples. Parents and teachers tend to agree more on externalizing behavior of children with learning problems, while this agreement decreases on internalizing behavior (Rosenberg, Harris, & Reifler, 1988). As it occurs in most studies of the general population, the agreement between parents' and teachers' ratings of children with learning disabilities is higher to externalizing-type behavior, but it is difficult to agree on internalizing-type behavior (Rosenberg et al., 1988). Other studies using selective samples, (for example Miranda, Soriano, Fernández, & Melia, 2008) show high correspondence between parents-teachers in rating the problems of noticeable behaviors, while agreement on invisible behaviors is much lower.

However, the high levels of agreement between parents' and teachers' ratings are important, because schoolchildren with reading problems often exhibit emotional and behavior problems or children with emotional and behavior problems often exhibit learning problems. However, the small number of studies regarding parent and teacher agreement on emotional and behavior problems of schoolchildren with reading problems restricts the utilization of the results of studies in this field.

3. OBJECTIVES

The aim of the present study was to investigate the agreement between parents' and teachers' ratings on narrow and broad scales of internalizing and externalizing problems of schoolchildren with reading problems, in the province of Milopotamos, in the municipality of Rethimnon, in Crete. The province of Milopotamos was selected because many behavioral problems have been reported including school drop-out, violence and rule-breaking. As it is

known, this is the first study in Greece, which investigates parent and teacher agreement in schoolchildren with reading problems and particularly in an area where it is difficult to carry out an interview with parents because of cultural beliefs.

4. METHODS

4.1. Participants and procedure

Two reading tests (decoding and reading comprehension) were given to all students (N=322) in third and fourth grade (8+ to -10 years old) from 18 schools in the Milopotamos Province. Only two schools (18 from 20 schools in total) were excluded from the research because there were no children attending third and fourth grade. Four schoolchildren with mental retardation were excluded from the study too (N=318). The subjects were classified according to their performance, ranging from highest to lowest ratings. From this classification, eighty schoolchildren (N=80), (58 boys and 22 girls), whose reading performance fell into the lowest rating distribution (scoring under 25%) comprised the group of schoolchildren with reading problems. The reliability concerning reading problems, based on low reading performance in children of the same age has been confirmed by Fletcher et al. (1994).

Parents (n=65) and teachers (n=79) corresponded and assessed each child with reading problems. All tests were given to parents and completed in the presence of the conductor of the research so that they would be completed appropriately without mistakes and misunderstandings. It was necessary for parents because most of them do not read well or even at all. It was also necessary for teachers in order to avoid misunderstandings and any bias resulting from the children's behavior, because most teachers, who work as teachers in the Milopotamos Province, come from other parts of Crete and Greece and were either afraid of completing a questionnaire on a child's behavior or reluctant to report any behavior problems especially those displayed by male children.

4.2. Instrument

Reading tests. The decoding and reading comprehension test is a set composed of four subtests: A) The decoding test is composed of a subtest of words and a text (Venianaki, 2009). B) The reading comprehension test composed of a subtest of a passage comprehension (Test of Reading Performance-TORP) (Padeliadu & Sideridis, 2000; Sideridis & Padeliadu, 2000) and a subtest containing a cloze (Venianaki, 2009). Reading tests' reliability and validity was high (Venianaki, 2009). Both the decoding and reading comprehension test were adapted in another rural area in Crete, in order to be given to all schoolchildren from third and fourth grade. We preferred using adaptive reading tests instead of standardized tests (with the exception of TORP) because more children in rural areas are not in a school grade appropriate for their age. Consequently, they could not be given a standardized reading test and each schoolchild's performance was compared to their classmates' reading performance, who were the same age and grade.

Intelligence test. The Raven's test (Coloured Progressive Matrices) is a nonverbal group intelligent test typically used in educational settings (Raven, Raven, & Court, 2003). It was given, in order to exclude children with mental retardation, The Raven test, rather than another intelligence test e.g., WISC, was selected because it is not affected by intercultural differences.

Emotional and behavioral problems. In order to assess behavioral and emotional problems, we used the Greek version of Achenbach's Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and Teachers' Report Form (TRF). The CBCL and TRF are two standardized questionnaires designed to obtain parents' and teachers' reports of behavioral and emotional problems of children aged 6-18. Both instruments have 118 items concerning children's behavioral and emotional problems and yield scores on five subscales, which are grouped into broadband scales of internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The internalizing scale is the sum of items from three subscales: anxious/depressed, withdrawn/ depressed and somatic complaints. The externalizing scale is the sum of two subscales: rule-breaking behavior and aggressive behavior. Parents and teachers rate how true each item is now or within the past 6 months using the

following scale: 0 = not true (as far as you know); 1 = somewhat or sometimes true; 2 = very true or often true.

4.3. Statistical analysis

To examine differences between parents' and teachers' ratings both on narrow and broad scales of the CBCL and TRF, we used raw scores for the analysis on each scale, because the use of T scores would mask differences in base rates and the level of perceived problems (Satake et al., 2003). We examined the correlations between scores rated by parents and teachers. Not all scores of each scale showed normal distribution; therefore we used Spearman's rank correlations.

5. RESULTS

The results of the CBCL and TRF questionnaires indicated that parents rated more children as having internalizing ($M=8.58$, $Sd=5.10$) and externalizing problems ($M=11.88$, $Sd=9.91$) than teachers ($M=7.73$, $Sd=5.90$), ($M=9.17$, $Sd=11.13$), respectively, but without statistically significant differences ($p>.05$) (see table 1). Teachers rated more children as being withdrawn/ depressed and having total problems ($M=38.13$, $Sd=24.46$) than parents ($M=37.38$, $Sd=16.64$) but once again without statistical differences ($p>.05$).

Table 1. Mean (SD) of narrow and broad scales on internalizing/externalizing and total problems rated by parents, teachers and agreement.

Emotional and Behavioral problems	Parent	Teacher	Correlation
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	p
Narrow scales			
Anxiety/depression	5.49 (3.39)	3.34 (3.67)	ns
Withdrawn/depression	2.25 (2.35)	2.76 (2.93)	.487***
Somatic complaints	.85 (1.08)	.63 (.93)	-
Rule-breaking behavior	3.02 (3.20)	2.50 (3.23)	.557***
Aggressive behavior	8.85 (7.09)	6.67 (8.35)	.635***
Broad scales			
Internalizing problems	8.58 (5.10)	7.73 (5.90)	.296*
Externalizing problems	11.88 (9.9)	9.17 (11.13)	.612***
Total problems	37.38 (16.64)	38.13 (24.46)	.324**

*** $p<.001$ ** $p<.01$ * $p<.05$

To determine the magnitude of correlations between parents and teachers' rating we conducted the Spearman correlation test. The correlations in broad scales were higher for externalizing problems ($r=.612^{***}$, $p<.001$) than internalizing ($r=.296^*$, $p<.05$) and total problems ($r=.324^{**}$, $p<.01$).

In the narrow scales on externalizing problems, the correlations were high in both scales (rule-breaking behavior and aggressive behavior: $p<.001$). Although the magnitude of parents and teachers' agreement has been low for internalizing problems, the findings in narrow scales are needed to explain. Parents and teachers do not agree on anxiety/depression scale ($p>.05$), but the magnitude of agreement increases on withdrawn/depression scale ($p<.001$). Analysis on somatic complaints could not be carried out because both parents and teachers assessed that somatic complaints do not exist and there was no schoolchild with high ratings in this scale. Consequently, parent and teacher agreement on internalizing problems is restricted to withdrawn and depressive behaviors, and total problems is low to moderate ($p<.01$) because it is affected by scores from narrow scales in internalizing problems.

6. DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate the agreement between parents' and teachers' ratings on internalizing and externalizing problems of children with reading problems, in the province of Milopotamos, in Crete.

The examination of broad and narrow scales in CBCL and TRF indicates that the good agreement is limited to externalizing problems. This finding almost exists in most studies, which either refers to general population (e.g., Roussos et al., 1999) or to selective samples (Rutter et al., 1970; Rosenberg et al., 1988). The agreement between the ratings of the parents and teachers with regard to externalizing problems indicates that these problems cannot be ignored. Parent and teacher agreement on both aggressive and rule-breaking behavior indicates that adults are aware of these behaviors. Certainly, we cannot support the view that parents or teachers are aware of the severity of the behavior and they just mention it without worrying about it.

Furthermore, high agreement on externalizing problems is deemed serious when reading problems arise at the early stages (8+ to -10 years old). This finding may explain high level of school dropout after elementary school and rule breaking behavior in teenagers and adults, since reading problems coexisting with externalizing problems are not being confronted. The significance of the coexistence of reading problems with externalizing problems in adolescence and adult life has long been reported (Goodman & Scott, 2005). Parent and teacher agreement on externalizing type-behavior in schoolchildren with reading problems must be taken into consideration by educational and health committees.

The low level of agreement on internalizing problems indicates that parents and teachers give different information about children's behavior. Information gained from each informant is important, unique and cannot be substituted for information gained from another informant (Achenbach et al., 1987).

Internalizing problems are more inner directed, not obvious and appear to be more difficult for both parents and teachers to agree upon (Rosenberg et al., 1988). The analysis of the results on the narrow scales on internalizing problems reveals parents tend to rate different items concerning emotional items as problematic. Children react differently to settings and adults (Cai et al., 2004) and existing problems may be expressed otherwise in different contexts. For example, some parents consider that their children's behavior is appropriate and not problematic at home, but teachers consider this behavior as problematic, or vice versa. Another illustrative example of low agreement is when some parents consider their children's behavior as appropriate and it is, while the same children demonstrate different behavior at school, as they are more anxious, and nervous owing to reading problems and lack of incentives for learning. Hence, the high level of agreement on withdrawn and depressed children's behavior indicates that this behavior is detected and potentially is the result or the root cause of reading problems. Nevertheless, this finding has to be interpreted with caution because of cultural beliefs about appropriate behavior.

Generally, behavior is perceived and interpreted differently. Teachers' ratings on schoolchildren's total problems are more than parents and this is expected, because school is a more demanding and restrictive setting than home. Teachers also tend to report problem behaviors affecting academic performance, classroom management, and peer relationships. This is evidence that the differences between teacher and parent ratings of behavioral problems are at least partly due to differences in the environments in which adults observe children's behavior.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This is the first Greek study examining the parent and teacher agreement on emotional and behavior problems of children with reading problems. Furthermore, this study was conducted in a province, where many behavioral problems in boys including school drop-out, violence and rule-breaking have been reported.

Teacher ratings for externalizing problems are the best predictor of referral for mental health services (Stanger & Lewis, 1993) and also for learning difficulties. Without there being an intention of diagnosis, we must take into account that schoolchildren with reading problems which co-exist with externalizing problems are at high risk for rule-breaking behavior. Consequently, further behavior problem evaluation is needed by educational services. This can be accomplished by Public Educational Institutions which exist in each municipality. Intervention programs can be designed for the prevention of behavior problems. Hence, further analysis of the behavioral problems that have been reported in this province is necessary. These findings may reflect problems coming from dysfunctional families but it also may be purely an artifact generated by cultural factors affecting responses to the questionnaires (Roussos et al., 1999). Even if it is an artifact, the combination of reading problems with high levels of externalizing problems explains school drop-out after elementary school, which is acceptable from the local community, as well as the incidents of violence and rule-breaking being reported. By this, we have to consider that the causes of school-dropout and violence in this area are deeper and multifactorial. However, regardless of the causes collaboration is needed not only between home and school but also collaboration on an even wider level. It is essential that there be involvement and support of local society, school consultants, and university faculties. Furthermore, teacher training is required for the application of the intervention programs. But it also requires development control and readjustment, if it is necessary.

Considering the existing economic and social circumstances, the planning of intervention programs at the early stages of a child's academic development is necessary in order to deal with reading problems and to increase reading skills. Besides, there are more dimensions that have to be considered. The Greek educational system has an academic orientation, while families' expectations are different. Curriculum, books, goals, aims and demands do not differ from urban, semi-urban or rural areas. Parents cannot help their children in their daily homework, since parental educational levels in rural areas are lower (Roussos et al., 1999). Results point to the need for multiple resources of assessing children and this is particularly necessary for children from rural areas, and of different cultural beliefs (Phillips & Lonigan, 2010). Consequently, high level of agreement in this study is important: firstly, because it maximizes parents' understanding and acceptance of children's difficulties and consequently this understanding and acceptance of children's difficulties maximizes the agreement for appropriate intervention. Increased communication between parents and teachers can lead to a greater understanding of children's behavior but also social-emotional protective factors (Winsler & Wallace, 2002). Secondly, because it is necessary for there to be planning of intervention programs at the early stages of a child's academic development in order to reduce the incidents of students dropping out of school and perhaps diminish the increasing rate of violence and rule-breaking activity in the area of Milopotamos.

8. LIMITATIONS

This study has several methodological limitations. Firstly, the effect of gender, father-mother occupation, type of school has not been considered up to now. Secondly, we only focused on narrow and broad scales on internalizing and externalizing problems, but not on other problems, such as ADHD. Our results should be interpreted with caution.

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KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Reading problems: students' difficulties in accuracy and/or speed of reading and also in reading comprehension, as a result of decoding difficulties.

Internalizing and externalizing problems: empirical syndrome scales, according to the dimensional classification of emotional and behavioral problems.

Intervention programmes: appropriate supportive programmes for prevention of dropout and behavioral problems.

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