Cross-setting consistent and setting specific strength behaviors in preschoolers: Influence on reported concerns

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1

Introduction

- Preschool children with behavior problems are at increased risk for future difficulties
- Problem behaviors occurring across settings are typically more of a concern
- Risk of more serious problems - higher when problems exhibit cross-setting consistency

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2

Parent-teacher Agreement

- Most correspondence research has focused on the magnitude of agreement of problems
- Research found greater agreement on positive behaviors
- Recent research found higher rates of co-identified strength than co-identified problem behaviors

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Hypotheses

- Above average behavior concerns → fewer strengths
- Average or below average behavior concerns → more strengths
- Cross-setting strengths > setting specific strengths on level of concern

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Sample

- 1595 preschool children, 2-5 year olds
- 793 boys and 802 girls
- Over 30 Head Start and state-funded preschool programs
- Each child had both teacher and parent ratings

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Measure - DECA

- 10 problem behaviors - behavioral concerns
- 27 strength behaviors - three subscales: initiative, self-control, and attachment
- normed on 2000 2-5 year olds: good discriminant, predictive, and construct validity
- Internal reliability: .76-.88 across 4 subscales

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6

Method/Procedure

- Strength items ratings dichotomized for "frequently" or "very frequently"
  - Cross-setting = present in both settings
  - Setting specific = present in one setting
- Behavior concern levels
  - Above Average (T-score > 60)
  - Average (T-score between 60 - 40)
  - Below Average (T-score < 40)

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Results

- Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) revealed significant effect of strength behaviors on the levels of both:
  - Teacher-reported behavior concerns [$F(12, 3048)$ = 59.33, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$]
  - Parent-reported behavior concerns [$F(12, 3110)$ = 16.54, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$]

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Results

	F-score range	η_p^2 range
Teacher report		
Cross-setting	56.4 – 187.2	.07 - .20
Setting specific	6.4 – 57.7	.01 - .07
Parent report		
Cross-setting	26.1 – 68.6	.03 - .08
Setting specific	.3 – 7.7	.01

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Conclusions

Higher levels of concern → lower strengths
(regardless if strengths found in one setting or both settings)

However…

magnitude of difference (effect sizes and F-scores) was > for strength behaviors found in both settings

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10

Implications

- Enhancing cross-setting strengths may be more likely to reduce behavior concerns
- Focus on parents and teachers working together
  - Sharing assessment information
  - Jointly developing strategies
  - Reinforcing behaviors across settings

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11

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12