What Do Parents Mean When They Rate Their Children's Behavior?[1]

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PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We used focus groups and cognitive interviews with linguistically and ethnically diverse parents of preschoolers in Los Angeles County to:

- Examine how parents understand and interpret rating scale items relating to children's social-emotional behaviors

- Develop a valid, reliable, and abbreviated assessment of children's social-emotional behavior via parent report

METHODS

- Focus groups (n = 6; spring 2007)
  - 57 parents from 5 racial/ethnic groups: Filipino, Korean, Chinese, African American, Latino (Spanish monolingual and bilingual/English speaking)
  - Conducted in Spanish or English; translators provided as necessary
  - Parents discussed social skills and problem behaviors of importance and concern to them
  - Conducted card sort of 51 items from 5 standardized rating scales or derived by the researchers; parents identified items as easy, hard, or uncomfortable to answer

- Cognitive interviews (spring 2007)
  - 53 parents of LAUP children (24.5% spoke Spanish primarily, 60.4% some college, 43.4% born in US)
  - Conducted in English or Spanish
  - Parents discussed rationale for answering 36 items from the Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales (PKBS-2; Merrell 2002) and 7 items developed by the research team
  - Parents identified and discussed items that were hard or uncomfortable to answer

FINDINGS

Figures 1 - 3: Percentage of Items Cited with High Frequency* by Focus Group Parents as Easy, Hard, or Uncomfortable to Answer
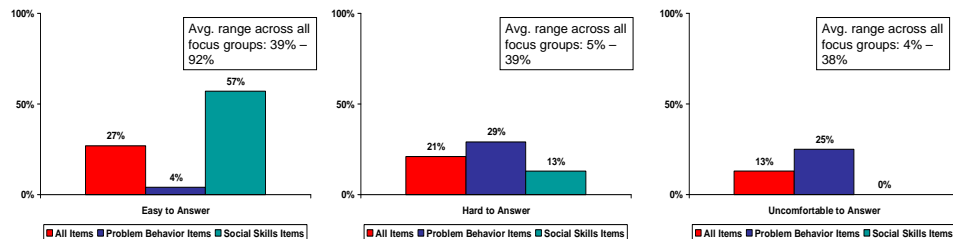
*Items cited by at least 75% of parents as easy to answer were considered high frequency. Because the overall frequency of items cited as hard to answer or uncomfortable to answer was lower, those cited by at least 25% of parents as hard or uncomfortable to answer were considered high frequency.

Samples of Item Adaptations Made Following the Focus Groups and Cognitive Interviews[6]

"Gives in or compromises with peers when appropriate"/ "Transa con sus pares cuando es apropiado"

- A high percentage of parents cited this item as hard to answer

- Parents perceived "giving in" and "compromising" as different things, making the item confusing

- The final fall 2007 parent rating scale excluded this item

"Is anxious and tense"/ "Es ansioso(a) o tenso(a)"

- Parents misinterpreted "tense" as hyperactive or muscle tension

- The final fall 2007 parent rating scale adapted this item → "Worries about things"/"Se preocupa por las cosas"

"Plays with several different children"/ "Juega con varios ninos(as) diferentes"

- Parents felt the inclusion of both "varios" and "diferentes" was confusing

- The final fall 2007 parent rating scale adapted the Spanish version of this item → "Juega con diferentes ninos"

- Generally, parents found the rating scale items easy to answer, especially the social skills items.

- Parents reported more difficulty and discomfort when interpreting and responding to items about the child's problem behaviors.

- Parents perceived some items and terms as confusing or not culturally relevant.

- Some Spanish items included terms that were inconsistent with local dialects.

- The final rating scale adapted or omitted items based on the importance of items to measuring the underlying constructs.

- Adaptations and omissions of items resulted in a final rating scale in fall 2007 with 45 items. All scales had adequate reliability (alpha ≥ .80) except the internalizing problems scale (alpha =.59). The internalizing scale included fewer items and a range of internalizing problem behaviors.

CONCLUSIONS

This research highlights the importance of using focus groups and cognitive interviewing for survey development.

Parents from diverse backgrounds interpret items in ways other than intended by developers.

Ethnically and linguistically diverse parents may have unique views of development and competence, but parents provide valuable data on children's social-emotional outcomes. Future work will examine the evidence of validity of this adaptation.

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