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Cultural differences in cross-informant agreement: evidence from a Russian-Kyrgyz study

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T. Achenbach's battery (ASEBA) is a robust measure used to assess emotional and behavioral problems in children and adolescents. It relies on ratings from the children themselves, their parents and teachers for a versatile assessment of psychopathology.

According to a meta-analysis of cross-informant agreement of the three ASEBA forms, the mean correlation over all scales was 0.25 between children and their parents, 0.20 - between children and their teachers, and 0.27- between parents and teachers (Achenbach et al., 1987). Slightly lower mean cross-informant agreement has been observed in Russian-speaking samples. In a 2010 study Grigorenko el al. reported the mean correlation between children and parent reports to be 0.14, there was no significant agreement between children and teachers, and between parents and teachers the agreement was 0.25.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether there are differences in cross-informant agreement between respondents with different cultural backgrounds when assessing emotional and behavioral problems. We collected data on the 3 concurrent ASEBA forms from 170 (51% girls) Kyrgyz and 470 (55% girls) Russian children 7 to 19 years old (M= 11.93, SD=3.1). The mean agreement across all scales between children and their parents was 0.20, between children and teachers it was 0.22 and 0.24 - between parents and teachers. These results fall in line with previously published data.

On the scale level, some interesting results stand out. The agreement between self- and parent-reported somatic problems was much higher in the Russian sample ($r(341)=0.39$, $p<0.01$) than the Kyrgyz sample ($r(110)=0.27$, $p=0.04$). There was no agreement between self- and parent-reported delinquent behavior in the Kyrgyz sample ($r(111)=-0.04$, $p=0.7$), while in the Russian sample the agreement was reasonable ($r(348)=0.27$, $p<0.01$). Going against the overall trend of teachers having the most agreement with parents, children and teachers had the best agreement on the delinquent behavior scale in both the Russian ($r(362)=0.52$, $p<0.01$) and Kyrgyz ($r(133)=0.24$, $p<0.01$) samples. These results can be related to cultural differences surrounding upbringing. Kyrgyz children are traditionally brought up by older siblings and have less contact with parents than Russian peers. Social desirability also likely played a role in the lower cross-informant agreement in the Kyrgyz sample.

Our results suggest that it can be worthwhile to establish the cultural backgrounds of participants filling out collateral report forms, and that caution is advised when combining cross-informant results from different cultural groups.