Reviewer's report

Title: How to understand discrepancies in parent-child reporting of emotional and behavioural problems? Effects of relational and socio-demographic factors

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Reviewer: Maria Serena Veggetti

Reviewer's report:

1. The contribution by B. Van Roy and her co-authors is well designed and organised in all its parts.

7. The topic of the discrepancies between parent/child reporting of emotional and behavioral problems is systematically exposed, as first through an analysis of the relevant literature, which is critically presented and commented upon (pages 3 to 5). On the basis of this analysis the authors introduce the hypotheses of their study, aimed at investigating the discrepancies in reporting the symptoms and their impact on daily life, by a huge group, of more than 8,000 parents- and-children- pairs (8,534 parents and 8,214 children, aged 10-13, resulting in a total of 8,154 matched cases).

2. The sample is large enough to ensure a good representativeness, since the youngsters are the 73.1% of all the preadolescents of Norway. The subjects participated in a previous epidemiological county study, done by the same authors, with the classes at each school level, 5th-7th grade, randomly selected.

The measures used are accurately described. They consisted in the extended version of the Strenghts and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), by R. Goodman (1999), with all its 5 subscales and with the impact supplement included. Other items about socio-demographic characteristics and relational qualities were also used to evidentiate the possible predictors of agreement vs disagreement, consisting in 1) a health questionnaire for the parents and, for the youngsters, 2) in a question about the familiar concern as perceived by them, with four response alternatives, and 3) a communication item with three questions, where the child could select, in a reported list, the more relevant persons for him, to adress in different situations.

The procedure used in the administering of the selected measures is also accurately described. The statistical elaboration is appropriate and articulated, giving way to a full understanding of the collected data. This can be evidentiated, for example, by the more subtle comparison of the disagreement/versus agreement reporting, obtained by dividing the parents and children into three subgroups with different percentiles, describing different levels of symptoms and impact, and in the subsequent performing of bivariate and multivariate regression analyses.

5. The authors state in the final part of the critical analysis of the relevant
literature, that the data obtained in previous research were inconsistent and didn’t allow precise expectations and hypotheses about the possible results. Nonetheless they didn’t adopt a procedure that could have brought a contribution in disambiguating the background of variables, consisting in the distinguishing the fathers’ versus mothers’ responses, by means of controlling the identity of the filled-in questionnaire. It could also give major elucidation about the reporting of more difficulties by boys then by girls and about the same pattern expressed by the parents, concerning the boys, in the evaluated impact. Of course, due to the total amount of subjects, it isn’t worth doing this now.

6. The same authors have clearly stated, in their final comment, the limitations and the need for further research, elucidating the predictors of the agreements among fathers, mothers and youngsters.

8. Summarizing, the title of the contribution is clear and gives a precise account of the main results of the research. The same can be written about the abstract, which presents the central topic of the research and its essential obtained results.

4. The contribution is written clearly and is interesting in allowing to consider the quality of the familiar relations and the socio-demographic characteristics of the parents (education, income) as good predictors in the evaluating of symptoms and impact on the social life more by the parents than by the children.

3. The data are sound. It seems consistent with the age of the sample of children addressed, the lack of a suitable evaluation, by the children themselves, of the impact of their symptoms on the social life.

9. Personally can formulate a positive opinion concerning the immediate publication of the contribution, since there isn’t any missing data or any type of mistake or deficiency to repair.