Reviewer's report

Title: Agreement between parents and adolescents on emotional and behavioral problems and its associated factors among Chinese school adolescents: a cross-sectional study

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Reviewer: Wan-Ling Tseng

Reviewer's report:

Most of my comments are in-between "Major Compulsory Revisions" and "Minor Essential Revisions"

Review

Manuscript titled “Agreement between parents and adolescents on emotional and behavioral problems and its associated factors among Chinese school adolescents: a cross-sectional study.”

General Comments:

This paper examined parent-child agreement on adolescents’ emotional and behavioral problems, assessed with the child behavior checklist (CBCL) and the youth self-report (YSR), in a large Chinese sample of 2199 adolescents and identified factors associated with the parent-child disagreement. This study found that the parent-adolescent agreement on emotional and behavioral problem was “moderate” (mean r = 0.6). Adolescents reported more emotional and behavioral problems than did parents. Increased informant discrepancies were associated with male gender, older age of the child, more negative life events, and lower levels of cohesion and organization and higher levels of conflict in the families. Some strengths of this study include: a large sample size and a non-Western sample. The topic of cross-informant agreement between parent and child reports on children’s internalizing and externalizing problems in a non-Western culture is a potentially important contribution to the literature. However, as described below, there are several concerns and limitations of this paper that the authors may wish to clarify and consider. I hope these comments are useful to the authors, and I thank the authors for the opportunity to learn about this work.

Abstract:

1. Please briefly describe the analyses conducted to assess parent-adolescent agreement.
2. According to Cohen’s convention for effect sizes, a correlation of 0.6 would be generally considered as indicating “high” correlation (i.e., high agreement).
3. In the Results section of the abstract, add “in the family” after “…. low levels of cohesion and organization and high levels of conflict.”
4. The “Implications and Contribution” section after the abstract seems out of place. This section should be shortened and incorporated into the “Conclusions” section in the abstract.

Introduction:

1. A few articles that are relevant for this topic were not reviewed and referenced in this paper. Below are some of these articles. The authors might want to conduct a more thorough literature review, incorporating more articles in this area to fully develop a rationale for conducting this study and the importance of the study.


2. More information is needed about why the specific associated factors (i.e., gender, age, negative life events, parent-child relationship, family environment) for parent-child disagreement were examined and how they affect cross-informant discrepancies. More discussion of this will help provide a stronger and more fully-developed argument for examining these factors.

3. The 6th sentence in the 1st paragraph is awkward. The authors might want to consider rewording it to something like “However, it is unclear the extent to which parents are aware of their children’s diverse behaviors and have the same threshold as their children when rating on emotional and behavioral problems.”

Methods:

1. Please provide more information on the sample characteristics, e.g., the socioeconomic status of the sample (e.g., parental education attainment, household income).

2. What is the class size of the classrooms in the schools?

3. The authors stated that 2426 questionnaires were returned, and 274 were excluded due to incorrect information or missing data. Subtracting 274 from 2426 does not yield a number of 2199, which is the final sample specified in the study. Please clarify.

4. The CBCL was completed by parents. What percentage of the CBCL was completed by mothers vs fathers or other caregivers/guardians?

5. How were the parents instructed to complete the CBCL? Were they specifically asked not to communicate with their child when completing the questionnaire? This may affect the parent-child agreement.

6. Were the adolescents and parents compensated for their participation in the study?
7. What are the Cronbach’s alphas for the internalizing and externalizing scales of the CBCL and the YSR for the current sample? Given that subscales, in addition to the total scale, were examined in the study, the Cronbach’s alphas for the subscales need to be described.

8. The authors only utilized a single item for assessing parent-adolescent relationship and parental expectations, respectively. Please justify the use of single item for these two constructs and the validity and reliability of the single-item measurement.

9. What are the Cronbach’s alphas for the seven subscales of the FES used in this study?

10. In the “statistical analysis” section, the authors stated that “All variables related to parent-adolescent discrepancies in univariate analysis (p<0.25) were entered into the model.” Is p<0.25 correct? Please clarify.

Results:

1. The SD of 54.9 for the mean difference between the total problems of YSR and CBCL seems really large. Please check and clarify.

2. Table 2: Did the authors examine the two-way interaction between informant and gender?

3. Table 4: Please indicate the significance level of the results.

Discussion:

1. In a recent article, Rescorla et al. (2013) reported a correlation of 0.46 between the CBCL and YSR in a sample of 1022 participants in China (Wang et al. [2005]), which is lower than the mean correlation of 0.60 reported in this study. Please comment on this. In addition, Rescorla et al. (2013) found that in Denmark, a non-Eastern culture, the parent-child agreement is as high as 0.58, comparable to the correlation of 0.60 reported in this study. I am curious to know the authors’ thoughts and comments on this finding.

2. How well do the findings of this study generalize to other Chinese societies such as Hong Kong and Taiwan? Please provide your thoughts and comments on this.

3. If parents completed the CBCL while communicating with their child, this may contribute to the high correlation between the YSR and CBCL. This should be discussed as a limitation of the study.

Minor Comments:

There are syntax and grammatical errors and unclear sentences throughout the paper. I think overall the paper would benefit from editing and re-wording throughout to improve the readability of the paper. Below is a partial list of some of these errors and awkward sentences and my suggestions. I strongly encourage the authors to carefully revise and proofread the whole manuscript.
Abstract:
In the 2nd sentence, “parents-adolescent” should be “parent-adolescent.”
The 3rd sentence could be re-written as “This cross-sectional study was conducted in November and December of 2010.”
Under the “Implications and Contribution” section, “an important role on” should be “an important role in.”

Introduction:
To be more specific and clear, the 4th sentence in the 1st paragraph could be re-written as “The Achenbach’s scales include child behavior checklist (CBCL) completed by parents or teachers and the youth self-report (YSR) completed by adolescents themselves to assess emotional and behavioral problems in youths aged 11-18 years.”
The sentence starting in line 9 could be rewritten as “Therefore, both parents and adolescents are needed to obtain a comprehensive assessment of emotional and behavioral problems among adolescents.”
Line 12-13, “used both informants” instead of “used both the two informants”
Line 17: few studies “found,” instead of “in”
Line 19: “a” higher level or higher level"s”
Line 20: change to “while a reverse pattern occurred in clinical samples”
Line 21: “It has been well established…”

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.