ASSESSING CAREGIVERS'(DIS)AGREEMENT IN THE EVALUATION OF CHILDREN'S CONDUCT PROBLEMS AND EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

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Background and aim. Previous research showed that informants observing their children in the same context (e.g. mothers and fathers) reported higher level of agreement in evaluating their children compared to those reporting from different contexts (parents versus teachers; De Los Reyes, 2015). Following this line of research, we first evaluated the level of (dis)agreement between mothers and fathers when rating two important indicators of their children’s psychological health such as conduct problem (CP) and emotional symptoms (ES). Second, as previous studies indicated that high negative parents’ emotionality was associated with the evaluation of their children’s psychological functioning (Clark et al., 2017), we also explored whether the informant (dis)agreement was linked to the level of distress and neuroticism experienced by both parents.

Method. Ninety-seven heterosexual couples (mothers M_age=36.64 SD=6.28; fathers M_age=39.08 SD=7.54) reported on their child’s (Girls= 50.5%, M_age=7.85, SD=3.70) CP (Cronbach’s α =.744, .730 respectively for mothers and fathers) and ES (α=.799,.839) using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997). Fathers and mothers reported their personal distress (α=.83,.79, respectively) using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) and neuroticism (α=.633,.642, respectively) with the Mini-IPIP scale (Donnellan et al., 2006).

Results. After establishing cross-informant scalar measurement invariance, Latent Difference Score analysis indicated no latent mean-level difference (mother − father) between mothers and fathers’ ratings on their children’s CP and ES (Δs=.139 and -.062, ps>.09, respectively). The effects of parents’ neuroticism and personal distress on CP and ES were all not significant (ps >.108).

Conclusion. Fathers and mothers showed a high agreement in rating their children’s CP and ES, thereby suggesting the possible interchangeability of these two informants in developmental research. Although parents’ neuroticism and personal distress were not significant predictors, future research should investigate whether other informants’ characteristics could affect the level of agreement when rating children’s CP and ES.