Who Sees What? Informant Discrepancy and Differential Sensitivity to Change Following Play Therapy

Dr. Louisa Ming Yan Chung
Department of Health and Physical Education, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Abstract

Multi-informant assessment is a cornerstone of paediatric mental health evaluation, yet informants often disagree on symptom severity and treatment response. This study examined cross-informant agreement and differential sensitivity to change in Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) ratings following school-based play therapy in Hong Kong. Fourteen children (ages 6-10 years; M = 8.14, SD = 1.10) receiving play therapy (M = 19.79 sessions) completed pre- and post-intervention SDQ assessments via child self-report, teacher/referrer, and parent informants. Cross-informant agreement was assessed using Pearson correlations at baseline. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated for each informant across SDQ subscales. Pre-therapy cross-informant correlations were low to moderate (Total Difficulties: r = 0.12-0.35). Teachers demonstrated the largest effect sizes across most domains (Total Difficulties d = 1.30; Conduct Problems d = 1.47; Peer Problems d = 1.14), followed by parents (Total Difficulties d = 0.77) and children (Total Difficulties d = 0.41). Teacher ratings moved from abnormal to borderline range post-intervention, while parent ratings remained in the abnormal range. These findings underscore the importance of multi-informant assessment in evaluating school-based interventions. Informant perspective - shaped by observational context - critically influences outcome interpretation.

Keywords

Play therapy, multi-informant assessment, informant discrepancy, paediatric mental health, strengths and difficulties questionnaire, school-based intervention.