



Review article

Measuring social skills of children and adolescents in a Chinese population: Preliminary evidence on the reliability and validity of the translated Chinese version of the Social Skills Improvement System-Rating Scales (SSIS-RS-C)



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ABSTRACT

The *Social Skills Improvement System-Rating Scales* (SSIS-RS; Gresham & Elliott, 2008) are designed to assist in the screening and classification of students (aged 5–18 years) who are suspected of presenting with social skills deficits and to offer guidelines in the development of interventions to remediate those types of problems. The objective of this study is to examine the preliminary reliability and validity of the translated Chinese version of the SSIS-RS, referred to as the SSIS-RS-C. In this study, parent-reported social skills and problem behaviors among students with typical development ($n = 79$) were compared with those of age- and gender-matched students with a known developmental disability ($n = 79$) using the SSIS-RS-C. The results indicated that the SSIS-RS-C subscale scores in all the disability groups were significantly different except for those in the Assertion scale for one disability group. Furthermore, the normative sample of typically developing children and adolescents (aged 5–12 and 13–18 years, $n = 567$) from Hong Kong was established to improve the psychometric properties of the SSIS-RS-C. There were moderate to strong relationships between the common subscales across all forms of the SSIS-RS-C. Acceptable to excellent levels of internal consistency across all common subscales was also obtained. The scores for the Hong Kong sample ($n = 567$) derived from the use of the SSIS-RS-C were then compared to the normative sample scores from the American version of the SSIS-RS. It was found that there were statistically significant differences on five out of the seven SSIS-RS-C Social Skill subscales for children aged 5–12 years and on four out of the seven SSIS-RS-C Social Skills subscales for the adolescent group (aged 13–18 years). Also, there were statistically significant differences between the American and Hong Kong samples on all of the SSIS-RS-C Problem Behavior scale scores. It was concluded that the SSIS-RS-C is a promising instrument for clinicians to be able to differentiate social skills and problem behaviors among students presenting with and without developmental disabilities in Hong Kong contexts.

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1. Introduction

Social skills are an important ability that students need to be successful and happy in their daily lives at school, with peers, and with their families. Well-developed social skills contribute to academic success and improved learning outcomes for students (Malecki & Elliot, 2002; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001). Students with proficient social skills know how and when to use a repertoire of social behaviors appropriately, including tone of voice, hand gestures, facial expressions, body posture, working cooperatively with others, and responding effectively in situations where conflict might occur (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). Conversely, students presenting with social skills deficits can experience poor academic performance and may develop social adjustment problems or serious psychosocial challenges in adulthood, including depression, anxiety, or suicide (Langeveld, Gundersen, & Svartdal, 2012; Tantom, 2000).

Social skills constitute an essential part of social competence, and deficits in this area are present in many students with identified special educational needs (SEN), for instance autism (Simpson, de Boer-Ott, & Smith-Myles, 2003; Ostmeyer & Scarpa, 2012), emotional and behavioral disorders (Gresham, Cook, Crews, & Kern, 2004; Maag, 2005), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Smith, Barkley, & Shapiro, 2007), conduct disorder (Dodge & Pettit, 2003), and intellectual disabilities (Smith & Matson, 2010). Since the introduction of inclusive education and a whole-school approach in Hong Kong in 1997, there has been an increase in the prevalence of students with SEN in mainstream schools (Hong Kong Government, 2000). As a result, teachers need to be able to effectively handle these students in the school classroom environment. This can be challenging for teachers because of the diversity of symptom presentation and the high degree of heterogeneity in the SEN population. As a consequence, it is necessary to address factors that negatively impact school success for these student groups.

It is evident that a valid and reliable measure of social competence and problem behavior is a key component for the assessment of these factors in education settings. Interventions that target problem skill areas early on can lead to positive interpersonal relationships and help to minimize behavioral difficulties by focusing on positive alternative skills (Hagen, Ogden, & Bjornbekk, 2011). There are several measures of social skills that incorporate a broad range of assessment methods, including ratings by multiple informants (e.g., parent, teacher, and child/adolescent self-report), naturalistic and structured behavioral observations, behavioral interviews, and socio-metric evaluations (e.g., acceptance by peers).

Observational rating scales, in particular, are frequently used due to their ease of administration and scoring, standardization, and use of multiple informants across a range of environmental contexts (e.g., school-based teacher ratings and home-based parent ratings). The most frequently cited social skills rating scales include the *Social Skills Improvement System-Rating Scales* (SSIS-RS) (formerly SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Elliott and Gresham, 2008), the *Social Responsiveness Scale* (SRS; Constantino, Przybeck, Friesen, & Todd, 2000) and the *Social Skills Questionnaire* (SSQ; Spence, 1995).

The SSIS-RS appears promising and warrants further consideration. By adopting a formalized, broad-based social learning and behavioral theoretical framework, the SSIS-RS has utilized a multi-rater assessment and intervention model in which

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