

Psychological assessment

The Unfair Card Game: A promising tool to assess externalizing behavior in preschoolers

Le jeu de cartes truqué : un instrument prometteur pour évaluer les comportements externalisés chez le jeune enfant

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Abstract

The assessment of externalizing behavior (EB) in preschoolers is crucial in developmental psychopathology. In the absence of any gold standard measure, new tools contribute to a multi-method and multi-informant approach. The aim of the current study is to present and validate a new observational paradigm, the Unfair Card Game (UCG), intentionally structured to increase the likelihood that negative affect, agitation and inattention will emerge during a video-recorded task. It was administered to 268 young children, and the results were validated by means of factorial analysis, reliability analyses, inter-rater agreement, test–retest, discriminant analyses and external validation with the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2004). The validity of the UCG is supported by the findings.

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Keywords: Observation; Psychometric properties; Preschoolers; Externalizing behavior

Résumé

L'évaluation des comportements externalisés chez les jeunes enfants est un enjeu crucial en psychopathologie du développement. En l'absence d'un instrument de mesure optimal, la validation de nouveaux dispositifs

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contribue à l'approche multi-méthodes et multi-informateurs. L'objectif de cette étude est de présenter et de valider un nouveau paradigme d'observation, le jeu de carte truqué (UCG). Ce jeu a été conçu pour favoriser l'apparition des affects négatifs, de l'agitation et de l'inattention au cours d'une tâche vidéo filmée. Il a été administré à 268 jeunes enfants et les résultats ont fait l'objet d'une validation par analyse factorielle, indices de consistance interne, accord inter-codeur, fidélité test–retest, analyses discriminantes et d'une validation externe avec le Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2004). La validité de l'UCG est soutenue par les résultats.

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Mots clés : Observation ; Propriétés psychométriques ; Comportements externalisés

1. Introduction

Behavior in young children can be considered as an extremely powerful indicator of well-being and mental health. Behavioral assessment reveals the goodness-of-fit between the child and his/her environment (Chess & Thomas, 1999; Churchill, 2003). In particular, it shows how the child with his/her own features, such as his/her intellectual and cognitive functioning, temperament, somatic and physiological functioning, copes with environmental requirements. And these requirements come from specific settings where the child interacts with caregivers themselves characterized by particular educational and emotional skills, values, expectations and dreams about the child (Super & Harkness, 1986). As such, behavioral assessment can reveal if the child's psychological balance between personal features and environmental requirements is overdue or broken. Or it can inform us that the child is going well. For this reason, its valid assessment is needed in any psychological or psychotherapeutic approach.

From a clinical point of view, some specific behaviors are of primary interest. This is the case for externalizing behavior (EB), which is characterized by agitation, opposition, aggression, provocation, and transgression of social norms (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2004). The identification of EB is very important since EB may interfere with the child's personal, social and academic development (Calkins, Blandon, Williford, & Keane, 2007; Owens & Shaw, 2003). The aim of the current study is to present and validate a promising new observational paradigm of children's EB, the Unfair Card Game (UCG).

As it will be exposed below, behavioral assessment can be obtained in preschoolers with two main methods, i.e. questionnaire and observational paradigm. Each method has both advantages and shortcomings. On the one hand, questionnaires are few time-consuming and they provide information about children's behavior in various daily situations. However, informant's bias can influence the results of questionnaire-based assessment. On the other hand, observations provide rich qualitative and objective information but they are time-consuming and limited to a very specific context. In the absence of a "gold standard measure", it is strongly recommended that a multi-method and multi-informant behavioral assessment be conducted (De Los Reyes & Kazdin, 2005; Kraemer et al., 2003; Roskam, Meunier, & Stievenart, 2013). In this way, UCG is presented here as a supplement to existing questionnaires and observational paradigms.

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