Utilizing Multiple Rater Perspectives in Emotional Disturbance Evaluation

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Abstract

Identifying students with emotional disturbance (ED) can be challenging. The Emotional Disturbance Decision Tree (EDDT) offers a comprehensive approach to gathering information from students, their parents, and their teachers. Key interpretive steps include assessing validity of ratings, making normative comparisons, interpreting scale and cluster scores, interpreting profiles of scale elevations, interpreting ratings between multiple informants, and interpreting change between ratings over time.

ED and the EDDT

ED is characterized by emotional and behavioral problems that affect a child's performance in school.

The EDDT assists in the identification of children who qualify for the federal Special Education category of ED and gathers information across multiple informants:

- EDDT Teacher Form (EDDT or EDDT-TF; Euler, 2007)
- EDDT Parent Form (EDDT-PF; Euler, 2010)
- EDDT Self-Report Form (EDDT-SR; Euler, 2016)

Case Example Background

Jamal is a 9-year-old third grader with a diagnosis of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) exhibiting behavior problems, including being disruptive and aggressive with teachers and other students. Tier I academic interventions did not help Jamal, so school staff provided Tier II interventions, including a functional behavior assessment and a behavior intervention plan, but these had minimal impact. Believing that Jamal may have ED, the school psychologist administered the EDDT-TF to his teacher, the EDDT-PF to Jamal’s mother, and the EDDT-SR to Jamal.

EDDT validity scale scores for Jamal were within the Acceptable range for each rater, suggesting the likelihood of valid profiles.

This evidence of comorbidity was very important as Jamal’s severe externalizing behavior had caused many staff to see him only as a conduct-disordered, socially maladjusted child, rather than a child with ED. In reviewing the ADHC Cluster, it seems a diagnosis of ADHD for Jamal is also likely.

Steps to EDDT Interpretation

Step 1: Examine Validity

The EDDT validity scale scores for Jamal were within the Acceptable range for each rater, suggesting the likelihood of valid profiles.

Step 2a: Interpret Scores Relative to Normative Expectations

The EDDT scale scores indicated the presence of ED in addition to meaningful social maladjustment (SM).

This evidence of comorbidity was very important as Jamal’s severe externalizing behavior had caused many staff to see him only as a conduct-disordered, socially maladjusted child, rather than a child with ED. In reviewing the ADHC Cluster, it seems a diagnosis of ADHD for Jamal is also likely.

Step 2b: Compare Base Rates for Various Clinical Groups

Scores in Jamal’s range on the EDDT-TF are more common in children with ADHD, SM, and ED, rather than in typically developing (TD) children.

Step 3: Interpret Within-Test Score Profile

Jamal’s EDDT-TF scale scores are most similar to those of children diagnosed with ED, with the highest elevation on the REL scale.

Step 4: Interpret Ratings Between Informants

The largest and most uncommon score discrepancies were found between Jamal and his teacher.

There are several reasons why this may be. Teachers often rate students as having more problems than parents or students do across diagnostic groups (ADHD, SM, ED; Euler, 2016). In addition, Jamal may be underreporting or unaware of his symptoms.

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Recommendations for Jamal

Jamal likely has ED as well as ADHD and SM. He is placed in a self-contained ED classroom with enhanced supports for his ADHD. He also begins receiving school social work services focused on relationship-building skills and improving coping skills for dealing with frustration, anger, and impulsivity.

Step 5: Interpret Between-Test Change

After Jamal spent several months in the ED classroom, Jamal, his mother, and his teacher took the EDDT again. Significant improvements were noted across most scales, indicating that his inclusion in the ED classroom and skill-building sessions were improving his behavior across a variety of domains.