DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUTH-THEORY OF MIND (Y-TOm) SINGAPORE VERSION

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

• Preliminary results indicated that this tool, Y-ToM, may be used as a valid and reliable instrument to measure advanced theory of mind in community samples of Singaporean youths.

• School support staff such as allied educators or school counsellors could use Y-ToM to identify and support students with social difficulties in their schools.

BACKGROUND

Socio-emotional Learning (SEL) is important for our students as they acquire skills, knowledge, dispositions to manage themselves and relationships effectively and make responsible decisions essential for personal and social well-being. The Ministry of Education (MOE, 2017) considers SEL to be a critical part of students’ learning to prepare them to live and work as adults in the 21st century.

As part of SEL, students are expected to develop the social awareness where they are able to accurately discern different perspectives, recognize and appreciate diversity, empathize with and respect others. Developing a localized version of Theory of Mind (ToM) test is the first step in understanding and teaching of SEL in our youths.

Advanced ToM refers to one’s ability to recognize others’ intentions, attitudes, desires and sometimes emotions and not just false belief (Happe, 1994). It is especially vital for youth/adolescents. To be successful in social interactions, an adolescent must be able to perform basic actions such as perceiving information accurately, understanding its stated and implied meaning, and responding appropriately according to the social context.

Most of the measures for advanced ToM were mainly developed in a non-Asian context, while previous research suggests that there may be differences in cultural aspects of understanding mental states such as liars’ intentions (Cheung, Siu, & Chen, 2015).

FOCUS OF STUDY

The current study aims to develop a measure of advanced ToM targeted at youth in Singapore, specifically the Y-ToM Singapore version, and to
preliminarily examine its psychometric properties in a community sample of Singaporean youths from 13 to 16 years old.

The Y-ToM consists of a set of test items/video clips (14 videos tapping on social understanding and the other 8 videos tapping on logical reasoning), each of which involved participants responding to a brief video depicting actors engaged in a naturalistic interpersonal interaction in the Singapore context.

KEY FINDINGS
Various aspects of validity (construct, concurrent, convergent, divergent and diagnostic) of the Y-ToM was established. In terms of reliability, internal consistency of the Y-ToM social subscale was acceptable, though it was poor for the Y-ToM physical subscale. Inter-rater reliability was good while test-retest reliability was lower.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS
Implications for practice
The Y-ToM may be used as a teaching tool to explain the nuances of the social situations. School psychologists might be able to include this Y-ToM in the battery of assessment to identify social difficulties in Singapore youths, and regular school support staff could also use the Y-ToM to support students with social difficulties in their schools.

Proposed follow-up activities
This study may only be suitable for measuring individual differences in ToM that are observed among typically developing youths and more work is needed to ascertain the utility for measuring clinically significant deficits in ToM in a clinical sample (e.g., youths with Autism Spectrum Disorder).

PARTICIPANTS
A total number of 170 adolescents between 13 to 16 years old (82 male, 88 female) agreed to participate. The sample did not differ significantly by gender. The parents of the youth participants (mean age = 45.09 years) were also recruited to complete a basic demographic form and a parent-rated form on their child’s behaviours.

RESEARCH DESIGN
The study adopted a cross-sectional design that used the following data collection methods: direct testing of the youths and parental questionnaire.

REFERENCES

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