Children Identified with Disabilities: Conjoint Behavioral Consultation Effects on Parent- and Teacher-Rated Child Behaviors

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Introduction
Parents of children with disabilities often experience significant challenges related to managing children’s behaviors. The challenge might be even greater if a child’s disability interacts with disruptive behaviors. Research on behavior ratings suggests that there exist discrepancies between informants (e.g., parents, teachers) probably due to the informant characteristics and the context where the behaviors are observed (Achenbach et al., 1987). A child’s characteristics such as a disability status could also affect informants’ ratings. Specifically, a child’s disability status might affect informants’ behavior ratings negatively, possibly due to perceived stereotypes or stigma related to the “label.” At the same time, parents and teachers of children with multiple challenges (i.e., disability, disruptive behaviors) might benefit even more from an intervention that involves collaborative efforts of family and school. This study aimed to examine the impact of a child’s disability status on a) parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of child behaviors at pretest and b) the effectiveness of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008) in children with disruptive behaviors.

Research Questions
1) How does a child’s disability status affect parents’ and teachers’ child behavior ratings at pretest?
2) Do children with identified disabilities benefit more from CBC than children who do not have an identified disability?

Methods
Settings and Participants
- 207 parents and 87 teachers of 207 Kindergarten through 3rd grade children
- Participating children were identified by teachers as displaying disruptive behaviors using the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (Walker & Severson, 1992) and related measures.

Design
- A randomized experimental design
- CBC: 52 classroom groups of 2-3 students (112 total students); structured, indirect service delivery by behavioral consultants over 8-12 weeks
- Traditional school support: 42 classroom groups of 2-3 students (95 total students)

Measures
- Dependent variables
- Social Skills Rating Scale (Gresham & Elliott, 1990): Total social skills score

Independent variable
- Child disability status: Receiving special education

Results
Question 1. How does a child’s disability status affect parents’ and teachers’ child behavior ratings at pretest?

Parent report
The omnibus MANOVA results revealed a statistically significant effect of disability status on dependent variables, Wilks’ λ = .82, F (6, 143) = 5.33, p < .01. Results of univariate tests are presented below.

Teacher report
The omnibus MANOVA results revealed statistically significant effect of disability status on dependent variables, Wilks’ λ = .92, F (6, 151) = 2.21, p < .05. Results of univariate tests are presented below.

Data analysis
- A random coefficients regression model (time*condition*disability) are depicted below.

Summary and Conclusion
- The impact of disability status on child behavior perceptions and on the effectiveness of CBC was found for parents but not for teachers.
- Across all behavioral outcomes, parents rated child behaviors more poorly for children who had an identified disability than for children who did not.
- Disability status did not affect teacher ratings of child behaviors with a single exception of adaptive skill.
- CBC effects as rated by parents were moderated by a child’s disability status. Compared to parents of a child without a disability, those whose child had a disability and participated in CBC reported greater positive changes in child behaviors, including externalizing problems, hyperactivity, aggression, and adaptive skills.
- Although a child’s disability may present a challenge for both parents and teachers, the perceived challenge appears to be greater for parents than for teachers. Also, parents of children with disabilities reported greater behavioral benefits from CBC than those with children without disabilities.