

Evaluation of quality of social interaction in natural contexts: A life span perspective

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Introduction

While occupational therapists consider social interaction to be a domain of concern, the majority rely on informal, nonstandardized assessment methods, including proxy- or self-report and role play. The Evaluation of Social Interaction (ESI) is the only standardized observational assessment for evaluating persons 2 years of age and up, regardless of type of disability. The person observed can be evaluated in virtually any naturalistic social exchange in any setting. Although social interaction is known to develop with age, there is no research documenting how quality of social interaction develops and changes over the life span.

Research question

What is the relation between age and quality of social interaction among well persons 2 to 80+ years of age?

Method

Participants will be at least 500 well persons, 2 years of age and above, and the majority will be from United Kingdom, North America, Scandinavia, Asia, and Australia. All participants will have been assessed by occupational therapists trained and calibrated as valid and reliable ESI raters. Data will be subjected to many-facet Rasch analysis to generate ESI quality of performance measures (based on observation of at least two relevant social exchanges), and the ESI measures will then be analyzed using SPSS to evaluate the relationship with age. Both linear and curvilinear relationships will be explored statistically and graphically via scatterplot.

Results

Preliminary analyses suggest that there will be a significant high positive curvilinear relationship with age ($R^2 = 0.80$), and that quality of social interaction will increase with age until about 16 years of age, plateau, and then decline slightly after age 50 years.

Conclusion

Positive findings will provide occupational therapists with evidence that quality of performance of tasks involving social interaction varies over the life span.

Contribution to practice

This study will provide the basis for normative data for evaluating a person's quality of social interaction in relation to age-matched peers.

Reference

Fisher, A. G., & Griswold, L. A. (2009). *Evaluation of Social Interaction*. Fort Collins CO: Three Star Press.