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## Using Parent Assessment of Child Occupation (PACO) alongside the Child Occupational Self-Assessment; feasibility study

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### Abstract

**Objective:** Although, Literature shows the significant role of parents in children's lives, there have not been any studies carried out on the parents' occupational assessments of their children.

**Materials and Methods:** A modified version of the Child Occupational Self Awareness (COSA) was created (Parents Assessment of Child Occupational, PACO) to assess the parents' assessment of their child's occupation. This feasibility study aimed at identifying the practical and potential issues of applying the COSA alongside PACO. As well as testing the value of identifying the similarity of discrepancies between parents (here mothers) and their children in assessing a child's occupational life. For this purpose, a convenient sample of 30 primary students aged between 9-10 years old, and their mothers were chosen.

**Results:** The content analysis of the COSA and PACO besides the supplementary information gathered by the interviewer showed factors which need to be considered in the main future study.

**Conclusion:** The findings indicate how mothers and their children have different interpretations of a child's competency and values in carrying out some aspects of occupation. There are some considerations with reference to the environment and related items of the tool, scoring, and administration which need to be addressed in planning for the main study.

**Key Words:** MOHO, COSA, PACO, Feasibility Study, Child competency, child value

### Introduction

Parents have always been considered as co-therapist in child related service such as occupational therapy, counselling, education etc... Follow up as an important element of successful intervention mostly depends on caregivers/ parents or mothers. Therefore, the mother's understanding of the children's capacity as well as their motives are the key for providing an appropriate demand/support for a child's life. Children are the center of their own intervention and their values are the central core of their cooperation with a therapist, caregiver, mostly a mother and other members of a multidisciplinary team. Despite of the great emphasis on the role of mothers in implementing the intervention plan, their understanding of their own children has not been given enough attention.

McCabe and colleagues (2007) indicated the significance of the message children receive about their body, food and sports activities from their parent and teachers. Also Shams and his colleague (2011), focused on the important role of parents in children's development. They noted that: "Parents, especially the mothers' knowledge of a child's growth and developmental stages and how to promote optimal nutrition is a critical factor and lead to the prevention of child stunting and increases the chances for a healthy and active life in adult-hood".

Bennet and his colleague (2009) studied children's judgments about a child's awareness of self-knowledge. The results showed that children, especially in the lower age groups believed that their mother knows them better than themselves. The term, "mother knows best" indicated the above results. However, this project did not investigate whether the mothers' understanding of their children was in harmony with what these children had thought about themselves.

While the importance of a parents'/ mothers' understanding of their own child has been emphasized in literature, children's occupational development however has not been studied previously. The model of human occupation is one of the well-respected models in studying human occupation. However in the field of children, this model has been used mostly for studying disruptions for occupation among children with a diagnosis such as hyperactive children, mental retardation or motor problems. This model has not been used for studying children without diagnosis before while carrying this out can help the understanding of occupational development (Kielhofner, 2008). The above review presents a gap in the field of knowledge about children's occupational life from their own perspective as well as their mothers' perspective regarding them. This paper is a report of a feasibility study that aimed to test whether a Parents Assessment of Child Occupation, PACO, which is a modified

version of Child Occupational Self-Assessment, COSA, can be applied for identifying parents' understanding of their own child's occupational life.

A feasibility study can be the pre-testing or 'trying out' of a particular research instrument (Baker 1994). Conducting a feasibility study helps researchers understand where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated (Teijlingen et al 2001). Even though the feasibility studies are important in research, publishing the feasibility studies reports is not common. Teijlingen and colleagues (2001) suggests "investigators should be encouraged to report their feasibility studies, and in particular to report in more detail the actual improvements made to the study design and the research process".

### Materials and Methods:

A convenient sampling approach was adopted in selecting the school and classroom within the school. This study was conducted on children and mothers with no diagnosis selected from a public school. The researcher has applied the COSA on 30 female students aged 8-9 of a primary school in Karaj. The PACO used for their mothers aged 27-42. Table 1 shows the details of the demographic characteristics of the sample.

The findings of the two tools were compared for each child. The results showed that mothers had identified a variety of similarity or discrepancies in different areas compared to what children had identified. Every child and their mother who agreed to be part of the study were included and no exclusion was applied. The classrooms with available time were identified by the principal of the school. It was planned that all children within that classroom would be considered as a potential participant unless the mother does not give the consent or the child showed themselves to be uncomfortable and disagree in participating. For that matter, to be evaluated, the interviewer gave time to explain to the students what the session was about and gave them a chance to think and decide to attend the interview or not. An invitation letter, information sheet and consent form was sent to parents through the school administrator. It was emphasized that the interview is for the purpose of research and the data will be treated with confidentiality, the researcher is independent from the school and the findings will not have any impact on the children's school results and would not be kept in students' files. The issue of confidentiality of the findings was emphasized to the children, additionally both mothers and children were also assured that their responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared with one another.

The interview with the children was conducted in the school extra activity time. Mothers were given a date and time to attend in an explanatory session and were asked to fill in the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher. However, five mothers had informed the researcher in advance about their

interest in participating in the task but not being able to stay at the school due to their limited time. Therefore, the researcher had agreed to give the questionnaire to be taken home, filled in and be returned in a sealed envelope by students to the school. This strategy had caused few complications in data analysis but was selected as an option due to practicality.

The proposal for this study was approved by the ethics committee of the Azad University and the selected participated schools. A convenient sampling was applied for selecting the school and the classrooms within and were chosen based on their availability as well.

### Researchers

One of researchers (LN) conducted the interview. She was a final year clinical psychologist with some training for interview, which was updated for interviewing children. She was also attended a workshop about Model of Human Occupation and COSA administration. The following themes were identified through a critical review of the gathered data and continues discussion and reflective practice of the first (LN) and second (FY) researcher who is an MOHO mentor experienced in the theory application in practice and administrating and interpreting the MOHO tools.

### COSA

The Child Occupational Self-Assessment (COSA) is a client-centered assessment tool and an outcome measure designed to capture youth's perceptions regarding their sense of occupational competence and the importance of everyday activities. The COSA may be used by professionals, concerned with understanding young people's self-perceptions of their abilities. This information can then inform intervention planning, and provide a mechanism for youth to participate in identifying goals and priorities for intervention.

The COSA contains 25 items that ask about everyday activities a young person may do at home, at school, or in the community. The COSA items pertain to different areas of occupations, including self-care, play and leisure, and learning. The COSA is a theory-driven and evidence-based assessment. The COSA can be administered using a variety of formats and modifications in order to provide young people with a range of abilities the opportunity to identify their strengths and needs. (Cramer et al 2006). Sattari et al (2013) translated the tool to Persian and that was used for this study. PACO was a modified version of the COSA to be used by parents (care givers). The questions are exactly the same as COSA but they have been changed grammatically to address a parent's perception of their own child's occupational capacity and values for occupation. MOHO states that when a child feels that an activity is very important but reports a low sense of competence for doing that activity, they are at risk of poor occupational adaptation (Kielhofner, 2008). Identification of gaps between Competence (performance) and Values (importance) provides the therapist with the opportunity to see where the youth experiences the

greatest dissatisfaction with occupational performance (Kramer 2006). According to the COSA manual, the gap would be identified by distracting the value score from the competency score with no acknowledgment of the negative or positive sign of the score. This means, in practice, it is important to see if there are any gaps that can indicate the child's occupational adaptation score which is interpreted as occupational satisfaction. The gap could mean one of the following:

- 1- Low score in capacity but high score in value (child doesn't perceive his/her own capacity as good to do the task but it is important for him/her to do so)
- 2- High capacity but low value score (child perceives his/her capacity in doing the task to be good but he/she doesn't see this as important)

Therefore, distracting capacity score from the value or the other way round will give a number which is between 0, +/- 1, +/-2, +/-3, +/-4. Originally based on the COSA application in practice the +/- sign would not be taken into consideration and therefore in this study only the gaps score were considered without considering the sign attached to it. The results of the quantitative analysis showed that there was no significant difference between the mother's gap score and the child gap score. However, research analysis of the scores item by item revealed that the +/- signs are significant when comparing the gap score from the COSA with the one from the POAC.

Appendix 1 shows the COSA items and Appendix 2 is a modified version called PACO.

<b>Number of children in the family</b>	1	11
	2	17
	3	1
	4	1
<b>Order of child</b>	first	19
	second	10
	Forth	1
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	25
	Divorced	5
<b>Employment</b>	With job	5
	no Job	25

## Analysis

Each item of the questionnaire provides 4 scores, two gathered from the child and two from the mother. The first score is the level of competency measured by the Likert scale and the second is the level of importance indicating the value of the questioned activity. The extract of these two scores was identified and called the gap. Gap identifies the occupational adaptation. Therefore, the 'gap child' identifies the occupational adaptation from a child's perspective and the 'gap mother' from a mothers' perspective. Finally the two gap scores; gap child and gap mother

were studied to identify the congruency or discrepancy between the two gaps.

Feasibility studies can be based on quantitative and/or qualitative methods. Researchers may start with "qualitative data collection and analysis on a relatively unexplored topic, using the results to design a subsequent quantitative phase of the study" (Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998: 47). This article presents the findings of a content analysis of the two tools through comparing the findings of two tools item by item. Critical analysis of the supplementary information gathered by the first researcher was applied as well which led to 4 identified themes. Therefore, researchers went through each child and mother respondent sheet and compared each element to identify the gaps. Then, mapping across the 30 samples of mothers and their children the common areas of discrepancy or similarities were identified. Finally, the results were studied against the qualitative data gathered by the interviewer through her notes about participants' behavior and dialog with the examiner while doing the tasks was recorded.

**Results** The aim of this study was to identify the practical and potential problems of applying the PACO alongside the COSA, as well as testing the value of identifying the congruency and discrepancies between parents (here mothers) and their children in assessing the child's occupational life. The findings are categorized as follows:

### Findings of this study can be divided into two main themes:

1. Results identified by applying PACO and COSA together and comparing the scores.
2. Findings related to the procedure of conducting the study and applying the tool.

### Results identified by applying the tool and comparing the scores.

#### Interpretation of items

The result of the children scores' in relation to three parts of the COSA (competency, value, and gap) were compared to the results of the same scores according to the mothers responses to the PACO. Going through COSA and PACO item by time across the 30 samples, showed that there were some discrepancies between mothers and their children in scoring the competency and value of different items of the COSA and PACO. Reviewing the scores as well as the qualitative data (interviewer's notes during administrating the tool) showed that there have been some differences due to the interpretation of the items by mothers compare to their children. Items such as '*moving around*' or '*shopping alone*' were understood by children as their lack of experience due to family values and no permission to go out alone while mothers mostly thought their child cannot do that individually. However there was a comment from a mother about usability to decide about this because the environment is

not safe enough to practice this with her child and evaluate her ability. +++

### Misleading gap score

Mothers generally gave lower scores to the importance of the item compared to children themselves. This is an important consideration, as it appears that mothers might have less understanding of their child's perception of the value of some of what they do. The mothers seem to emphasize more on the capacity and intended to show it generally higher than the child themselves. This led to a gap between the competency and value of the item as assigned by child compare to the mother. Even though the gap score was similar in most cases but the direction of the gap shown by a negative or positive sign was different. For example item 1: *I can manage my self-care*. (Can your child manage her self-care). Mothers mostly responded that the child has the capacity to do that but doesn't care about it or in other words it is not important for them. So a high score for the capacity and lower score for the value were given by mothers. However children themselves had given lower scores to their capacity and higher scores to the importance. Thus, their gap was in different directions compared to the gap identified by mothers. Table 1 shows COSA and PACO and the frequency of gaps per item. Gap 1 and -1 was still considered as congruence but gaps higher than that were considered as incongruence. It is not the aim of this paper to provide the details of the gaps and also quantitative analysis of the data.

### Findings related to the procedure of conducting the research study and applying the tool (mothers / children insecurity about findings)

There were some comments from mothers that could be interpreted as their anxiety about the findings. Within a school context the interpretation of a child's low competency could be perceived as a risk for the child or parents being blamed. Even though the researcher provided parents and children both with a rationale and explanation about the aim of the study and emphasis on the fact that the assessment is not a form of exam but it felt students trusted this more easily than mothers. Overall, mothers did not like their child appearing as someone with a low competency and there were comments about their child being lazy, naughty, irresponsible, lack of discipline as new generations will be, to explain the potential low score.

### Discussion

The findings of this feasibility study indicate the importance of studying the application of COSA and POAC in more detail. Benet et al (2009) stated their results of studying children's self-awareness as 'mother knows best' and this study shows that mothers may not have the best understanding of their children's values of doing things. Even though these findings are not

transferable but signify a value to pursuing further studies in this relation. The POAC can be a good guideline as it is parallel to the child's self-assessment of their own occupational capacity and values. This could lead to developing a conversation with parents and supporting them to reflect on their understanding of their own child.

The findings of this study demonstrate that some of the items of the questionnaire should be modified in order to transfer clearer meaning to both child and mother. There is also a great value to the contextual factors, which shapes the interviewer and respondents' relationship to build the necessary trust for an honest response. The school environment while the most accessible place for finding samples seemed to create anxiety for both children and their mothers due to the prediction of the impact of the respondents on the child-school relationship. This study showed the expertise of the interviewer was an important element in overcoming this obstacle. Mothers responding to the questionnaire in the presence of the reviewer had a better chance for clarification of the items as well as avoiding contamination of the responses due to a mother and child's conversation at home.

The study also showed the importance of the negative or positive gaps between scores that implies whether responses were given higher marks to the capacity score for each item or the value. In the original COSA tool this issue is not important as the gap is considered meaningful when higher than 2, regardless of positive or negative. This means the significant gap in COSA results is interpreted as child occupational problem with occupational adaptation that leads to child dissatisfaction with their occupation. However, when comparing parents and children's results it is important to understand the rationale behind the COSA gap and the PACO gap. This is because in comparison they transfer different meanings as discussed before in the result section. .

### Conclusion

The feasibility study concluded that the COSA parent seems to have the potential for use in child settings, clinics or schools which collaborate the intervention plan and particularly goal setting by therapist/ counsellor/teacher, mother and child. This feasibility study also identified changes that are needed to be considered in the original tool and the complementary one (POAC) as well as the implementation plan in further study to ensure the quality of research. The aim of this feasibility study was to identify the practical and potential problems of applying the COSA and POAC as well as testing the clinical value of identifying the similarity of discrepancies between parents (here mothers) and their children in assessing the child's occupational life.

The tool seems to provide valuable knowledge about the mothers' perception of their children. This can be used as a good reference to building a cooperative relationship among members of a therapy/education team; child, mother and therapist/counselor, teacher. Therefore, the tool can provide

valuable practical use and researching it further, considering what is learnt from the feasibility study is recommended.

Conflict of interest: None.

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