

ABSTRACT

Theory of mind and inhibitory control in young children have both been hypothesized as the underpinnings of their social functioning. According to the theory of mind hypothesis, children's capacity to recognize and represent other's emotions, beliefs, and desires constitutes the very foundation of social development. The executive dysfunction hypothesis, on the other hand, attributes social performance to domain-general executive processes, specifically inhibitory control. The two accounts have been typically conceptualized as separate theoretical positions; little research has been directed at comparing them. I conducted three studies to address the issue. In Study 1, no significant association was observed between 4-to-6-year-olds' inhibitory control and theory of mind performance. Theory of mind explained withdrawal symptoms over and above inhibitory control, which was not a unique predictor itself. Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1; inhibitory control played no significant role in theory of mind and social performance in 5-to-6-year-old children. Theory of mind was shown to be inversely related to a range of social deficits; and was positively related to self-control behavior. Study 3 replicated the correlation between theory of mind and social deficits in a 3-to-4-year-old sample. Children's theory of mind performance was negatively associated with withdrawal symptoms. Inhibitory control had limited explanatory power for social deficits after controlling for theory of mind. The current findings are consistent with the theory of mind hypothesis, suggesting an integral role of theory of mind in children's social development, independent of inhibitory control.

摘要

在兒童社交發展的研究中存在着兩種假說：“心理理論假說”視兒童對他人情感、信念及欲望之表征和認知能力為社交發展的基礎。相對地，“執行能力缺陷假說”則認為執行能力，尤其是抑制能力，能更有效地解釋兒童的社交行為。這兩種論說一般都被視為獨立的理論假設；迄今為止，較少研究曾對心理理論和執行能力在兒童社交發展的影響作出比較，此研究擬對此問題作全面系統的探討。研究一的結果顯示，4-6歲兒童的抑制能力跟心理理論沒有顯著關係。在控制抑制能力因素後，兒童的退縮/不合群行為跟他們的心理理論存在顯著相關。另一5-6歲兒童的研究再度證實了抑制能力跟心理理論和社交能力沒有顯著的關係；心理理論能力跟數種社交問題及自我控制行為存有顯著的相關。最後，研究三的結果顯示，3-4歲兒童的心理理論能力跟退縮/不合群行為存有顯著相關。抑制能力能顯著地預測兒童的社交問題，但在心理理論被控制後，抑制能力跟社交問題之間的相關則不再顯著。總括而言，研究結果表明了心理理論在兒童社交發展中的重要性。