

On the Concept of Social Cognition and the Instruments Used to Assess It



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Dear Editor,

I read with great interest the article by Koçyiğit and colleagues (2025), titled “Psychometric Properties of Turkish Instruments Assessing Social Cognition in Psychiatry and Neurology: A Systematic Review.” This systematic review provides a comprehensive review of the social cognition measures available in Turkish for use in psychiatric and neurological conditions and fills an important gap in the literature. In particular, the review highlights the limited number of instruments assessing social perception and the insufficient psychometric evidence available for many existing measures.

In the article, social cognition is defined in terms of processing information about social situations and other people, mentally representing the relationship between oneself and others, and the ways in which these representations guide social behavior. This definition presents social cognition as a broad construct that goes beyond a set of specific cognitive processes and is closely related to interpersonal relationships and social functioning. In contrast, many of the instruments appear to focus on specific social-cognitive functions, such as emotion recognition, theory of mind, and attributional processes. This pattern shows which components of social cognition are assessed more frequently and which are more visible in the literature. Although social cognition is generally considered to include multiple components, such as emotion processing, theory of mind, social perception, and attributional processes, there is no clear consensus on whether these components represent separate dimensions or are parts of a broader, more integrated construct. Factor-analytic studies have also produced different findings. Some findings

support separate dimensions, whereas others suggest a more general social cognition factor (Browne et al. 2016; Pinkham 2021). Therefore, it is important to consider the extent to which existing social cognition measures capture the different components of this broad construct.

This question concerns not only the theoretical structure of social cognition but also how it is assessed. From the perspective of psychological assessment, measurement instruments do not provide direct access to psychological constructs. Instead, they provide indicators that can be used to make inferences about these constructs. The literature on construct validity emphasizes that psychological constructs should not be equated with the instruments used to measure them and that measurement cannot be considered independently of how constructs are theoretically conceptualized (Cronbach and Meehl 1955; Messick 1995; Clark and Watson 2019).

Social cognition involves not only recognizing specific social cues but also interpreting these cues within interpersonal relationships and social contexts. These interpretations also play a role in guiding behavior. Therefore, it is important to consider how well social cognition tasks capture the contextual and interpersonal features of the construct. This concern is also related to ecological validity, including how closely tasks resemble everyday social interactions and how task performance is associated with real-world social functioning (Cavieres et al. 2025). The review by Koçyiğit and colleagues provides a useful basis for considering these broader methodological questions in relation to Turkish-language measures of social cognition.

Within this framework, the role of measurement instruments in research also deserves attention. Research tasks provide

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data and also help researchers study particular social-cognitive processes systematically. When particular tasks are widely used, the processes they assess can be studied in greater detail and compared across different samples. As a result, empirical knowledge about these processes may accumulate more quickly over time. The literature may then become concentrated around certain components, while others remain less visible. This does not mean, however, that the concept of social cognition is determined by the instruments used to assess it. Rather, empirical knowledge may accumulate over time around components that are easier to study using particular measurement instruments. As the review by Koçyiğit and colleagues also suggests, the literature on social cognition may therefore become concentrated around particular components. The main question, therefore, is not only whether existing tasks represent social cognition. It is also important to consider which dimensions of this broader construct they bring into focus and whether they support valid inferences about these dimensions.

In light of the questions raised in this letter, the review by Koçyiğit and colleagues (2025) not only provides a systematic overview of Turkish-language instruments for assessing social cognition but also provides an opportunity to reconsider the relationship between current assessment approaches and the theoretical scope of social cognition. It is therefore important to develop assessment approaches that better reflect the contextual and interpersonal nature of social cognition and better represent real-world social interactions. In this regard, the Hacettepe Computer-Based Theory of Mind Battery, which uses three-dimensional animations of social interactions, is a recent example from the Turkish literature of an assessment approach that considers both ecological validity and psychometric properties (Kademli and Cangöz Tavat 2025). The review also shows that relatively few instruments are available for assessing social perception and social knowledge. Therefore, more assessment tools

are needed for these underrepresented domains of social cognition. The recent Turkish adaptation of the Situational Feature Recognition Test-2, which assesses social knowledge, is one example of efforts to expand the range of instruments available in this domain (Türkoğlu et al. 2025). Evaluating social cognition instruments not only for their psychometric properties but also for the dimensions of social cognition about which they support valid inferences may contribute to future methodological discussions.

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