Abstract
Social skills training for children is becoming increasingly popular as a measure for developmental crime prevention. Although previous reviews of such programs have shown positive effects, they have also revealed problems of research design, outcome measures, and long-term follow up. Accordingly, this article reports on a recent meta-analysis of randomized evaluations of the effect of social skills training in preventing antisocial behavior and promoting social competence. Of 841 retrievable references, 84 research reports with a total of 136 treatment-control comparisons fulfilled the eligibility criteria. Results showed a small but significant overall positive effect of $d = .39$ at post-intervention and $d = .28$ at follow-up (3 months and later). Effect sizes were somewhat greater for outcome measures of social competence than for measures of antisocial behavior, particularly when delinquency was assessed. Cognitive-behavioral programs revealed the best results in terms of generalization over time and on outcome criteria. In addition, prevention measures indicated for children and adolescents who already manifested some behavioral problems had higher effect sizes than universal approaches. Because most studies dealt with small sample sizes, non-official outcome data, and measurements after less than one year, the results should be interpreted with caution. Further high-quality studies with long-term empirical outcome criteria are needed, particularly outside the United States.