



THE USE OF THE STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES QUESTIONNAIRE (SDQ) AS A SCREENING INSTRUMENT FOR BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS IN PRESCHOOLERS

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INTRODUCTION

1. The issue

- ◆ Around **10%** of **school-aged children** encounter mental health problems (Meltzer, Gatward, Goodman & Ford, 2000). Current evidence also suggests that developmental and behavioural problems are common even among **preschoolers** (Hughes, White, Sharp- en, & Dunn, 2000; Keenan & Wakschlag, 2002).
- ◆ Emotional and behavioural problems may have a positive outcome if they are treated early. However, they often go **undetected** and may **in long-term** result in significant **distress or impairment** to the child and his/her family (Meltzer, Gatward, Goodman & Ford, 2000).
- ◆ Thus, **screening questionnaires for detecting and measuring children at high risk for behavioural or developmental problems**, with a view to further assessment and treatment if necessary, are highly required.

2. The questionnaire

- ◆ The **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)** (Goodman, 1997) is a brief behav- ioural screening questionnaire which has been translated into over **40 languages**. The SDQ presents **25 attributes**, some positive and others negative, and asks the respondent wheth- er he/she thinks that these attributes are "not true", "somewhat true" or "certainly true" for the child. The 25 items are divided in five scales of five items each, generating scores for **Emo- tional Symptoms, Conduct Problems, Inattention-Hyperactivity, Peer Problems** and **Prosocial Behaviour**. All scales but the last are summed to generate a **Total Difficulties** score.
- ◆ The SDQ has been found to have good psychometric properties and is being proved as a particular useful instrument in **epidemiological, developmental** and **clinical research** in several countries (Goodman, Ford, Simmons et al., 2003; Mathai, Anderson, Bourne, 2003).

METHOD

1. Aim of the study

- ◆ The aim of the present study was twofold:
 - a) to assess the SDQ as a **potential means for improving the detection of child behav- iour problems in the community**, and
 - b) to provide **normative data on several behaviour problems in Greek preschoolers**.

2. Sample and procedure of the study

- ◆ The **nursery teachers** of **974** children and the **mothers** of **787** children (**N=1761**) aged **3-6**, enrolled in kindergartens and nursery schools in Athens, filled in the translated Greek version of the SDQ for each child. Age and gender distributions were as follows: m=56.97 months, s.d. = 9.79; 52.2% males, 47.8% females.

RESULTS

Table 1. Frequencies of the SDQ scales for the sample as a whole

SDQ scale	Total (N=1757) %
Total Difficulties	11.7
Emotional Symptoms	6.8
Conduct Problems	16.9
Hyperactivity	12.1
Peer Problems	8.6
Prosocial Behaviour Problems	12.5

1. 11.7% of the sample presented some kind of behaviour problems.
2. The most common were conduct problems (16.9%) and hyperactivity / inattention (12.1%)

Table 2. Means (SD) and t values, according to mothers and nursery teachers

SDQ scale	Mothers (N=787) Mean score (SD)	Teachers (N=974) Mean score (SD)	Total (N=1757) Mean score (SD)	t value
Total Difficulties	8.5 (4.8)	8.3 (6.4)	8.4 (5.8)	.81
Emotional Symptoms	1.9 (1.7)	1.6 (2.0)	1.7 (1.9)	2.9*
Conduct Problems	2.2 (1.6)	1.7 (2.0)	1.9 (1.9)	5.1**
Hyperactivity	3.2 (2.2)	3.1 (2.8)	3.1 (2.5)	.95
Peer Problems	1.3 (1.5)	1.9 (1.9)	1.6 (1.8)	-7.1**
Prosocial Behaviour	7.7 (1.9)	7.0 (2.6)	7.3 (2.4)	7.0**

*p<.05, **p<.001

3. Mothers reported more frequently emotional and conduct problems than nursery teachers did.

4. Nursery teachers reported more frequently peer and prosocial behaviour problems than mothers did.

5. Mothers and nursery teachers did not differ in the Total Difficulties Score and the Hyperactivity Scale.

Table 3. Means (SD) and t values for boys and girls

SDQ scale	Boys (N=912) Mean Score (SD)	Girls (N=835) Mean Score (SD)	Total (N=1757) Mean Score (SD)	t value
Total Difficulties	9.1 (6.0)	7.5 (5.4)	8.4 (5.8)	5.8**
Emotional Symptoms	1.7 (1.8)	1.8 (2.0)	1.7 (1.9)	-.09
Conduct Problems	2.2 (2.0)	1.6 (1.7)	1.9 (1.9)	5.9**
Hyperactivity	3.6 (2.7)	2.6 (2.3)	3.1 (2.5)	8.2**
Peer Problems	1.6 (1.8)	1.6 (1.7)	1.6 (1.8)	.99
Prosocial Behaviour	7.0 (2.5)	7.6 (2.2)	7.3 (2.4)	-5.2**

**p<.001

6. Boys were reported to face more behavioural problems on the whole than girls were.

7. Also, boys were reported to face more frequently hyperactivity, conduct and prosocial behaviour problems than girls were.

8. Boys and girls were not found to differ in the Emotional Symptoms and the Peer Problems Scale.

DISCUSSION

- ◆ The results of the present study are preliminary, but are in accordance with those of other countries (Klasen, Woerner, Wolke et al., 2000; Widenfelt, Goedhart, Treffers and Goodman, 2003).
- ◆ The SDQ can indicate the developmental disabilities that, according to mothers and nursery teachers, are present even in the preschool years.
- ◆ Therefore, the Greek version of the SDQ could serve as a promising screening instrument to improve the detection and treatment of early developmental and behavioural difficulties.
- ◆ Future research should concentrate on the validation of the SDQ in the Greek language.

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