



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology



Division of
Clinical Psychology



SUMMARY: USE OF THE STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MONITORING THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Stream 2 of the wider project: Gathering feedback and measuring outcomes and change with Children and Young People with Learning Disabilities (LD)

May 2021

Eric Emerson

Lead Stream 2 for interrogation of Millennium Cohort Study data on Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

Emeritus Professor of Disability and Health Research, Lancaster and Sydney Universities

Find more information here:

<https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/feedback-and-outcome-measures-for-children-and-young-people-with-learning-disabilities/>

Summary: Use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for monitoring the wellbeing of children and young people with learning disabilities

Gathering feedback and measuring outcomes and change with Children and Young People with Learning Disabilities (LD)

SUMMARY

It has been suggested that the pattern of emotional and behavioural difficulties may be different among children and young people with learning disabilities when compared to their peers. Therefore, it has been argued that scales developed for the general population may not be applicable to children and young people with learning disabilities, especially those with more severe learning disabilities. The aim of this report was to present new data, extracted from the UK's Millennium Cohort Study, on the face validity, factorial structure and reliability of the SDQ when used with children with learning disabilities.

FACE VALIDITY

There is relatively robust evidence that: (1) a wide range of emotional and behavioural difficulties are more common among children with learning disabilities when compared with their peers; and (2) that these difficulties are associated with increased family burden. The analyses of SDQ data presented in this report (including subscale scores and result of the impact supplement) are fully consistent with this existing literature. The analyses also indicated that, in general, greater severity of learning disabilities tended to be associated with more severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Numbers of children with more severe learning disabilities (IQ equivalent <60) are low.

FACTORIAL STRUCTURE AND RELIABILITY

- The analyses undertaken do suggest that the factorial structure of the SDQ may be less stable for children with learning disabilities. However, this may also simply reflect the much smaller sample sizes available for children with learning disabilities.
- There were no systematic differences in the internal consistency of the SDQ scales between children with and without learning disabilities.
- Consistent with the results of previous research, the association between maternal report and teacher report of emotional and behavioural difficulties were weak to modest. There were no systematic differences in the strength of these associations between children with and without learning disabilities.
- Consistent with the results of previous research, the association between maternal report and child self-report of emotional and behavioural difficulties was weak. Overall, the association was stronger for children without learning disabilities. However, this difference was only apparent for girls.
- Among children with learning disabilities there was very little evidence that key psychometric characteristics of the SDQ vary by severity of learning disability in the sample.

CONCLUSION

We found little evidence to support the contention that the parent completed SDQ may not be applicable to children and young people with learning disabilities, including those with more severe disabilities in the sample.