



# Assessing Child Well-being: The Psychometric Properties of the SDQ in Alternative Care Settings

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**ABSTRACT** – The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) is widely used to assess children’s well-being. This study is the first in Luxembourg to examine the SDQ’s psychometric properties in alternative care settings (ACS), for 257 children (45.9 % female,aged 11 to 18, $M=14.62,SD=1.93$ ) residing in residential or family-based alternative care. Results show overall acceptable agreement between children’s self-report and educator’s observer-report, as well as meaningful correlations with other mental health measures. Internal consistency was overall deemed acceptable, although some issues were noted for the self-report subscale of peer problems. These findings generally support the SDQ as a helpful mental health assessment in the context of alternative care.



Internal Consistency  
Acceptable



Convergent validity  
Acceptable



Informant agreement  
Acceptable

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND** – Children in ACS frequently experience **severe, persistent maltreatment** (Tarren-Sweeney, 2023). Resulting **psychological difficulties** occur at increased rates and intensities compared to those not in care (Tarren-Sweeney et al., 2019)The SDQ is an instrument commonly used to assess the well-being of children. Across anglophone countries, it is used in ACS to **screen for potential mental health difficulties** in this demographic, e.g., the UK (Mental health and well-being of looked-after children, 2016) and Canada (Protection and in care, 2019). Despite that, the suitability of the SDQ in Luxembourgish ACS remains underexplored.

## METHODS Convergent validity

To assess concurrent validity, **Pearson correlations** were performed in IBM SPSS between SDQ **total scores and subscales** , for **self- and educator- reports**. Correlations with **SCARED** (Birmaher et al., 1997), **SMFQ** (Angold & Castello, 1987) and **WHO-5** (WHO, 1998) were examined.

## METHODS Internal consistency

The reliability of the SDQ was assessed using **Cronbach’s Alpha** and McDonald’s Omega coefficient in RStudio Version 2024.04.1+748. Values above **.70** were considered indicative of acceptable reliability. Reliability analyses were conducted for children’s self-report and educator-report separately.

## METHODS Informant agreement

Informant agreement was measured by **correlating self-reported SDQ scores of children** with observer-reported scores by **educators** on a total scale and subscale level. To achive this, a series of Pearson correlations was carried out utilizing IBM SPSS.

## RESULTS



References

Table 1  
Pearson correlations between the SDQ (total scale, internalized sum score) and SCARED, SMFQ, and WHO-5.

	SDQ intern. Ado.	SDQ total score Edu.	SDQ intern. Edu.	SCARED total scale	SMFQ total scale	WHO-5 total scale
SDQ total score Adolescents	.77** .75** .76**	.27** .21* .34*	.23** .20* .22*	.48** .44** .46**	.60** .51** .63**	-.33** -.14 -.43**
SDQ internalized Adolescents		.14* .07 .23**	.28** .01 .27**	.64** .53** .65**	.62** .55** .64**	-.36** -.18 -.46**
SDQ total score Educators			.73** .72** .75**	.16** .11 .26**	.15* .06 .25**	-.06 -.13 -.03
SDQ internalized Educators				.25** .21* .24**	.10 -.002 .14	-.02 .001 .002
SCARED total scale					.62** .55** .64**	-.29** -.09 -.39**
SMFQ total scale						-.47** -.34** -.55**

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . Correlations were performed for the entire population and separately for gender. Female and male are indicated.

Table 2  
Internal consistency indicated by standardized Cronbach’s Alpha and McDonald’s Omega for SDQ total score (prosocial behavior excluded), internalized score self- and observer-report.

	SDQ total score	SDQ internal.	Prosocial Behavior	Hyper-activity	Conduct Problems	Emotional Problems	Peer Problems
Ado. Alpha	.69	.69	.63	.58	.58	.68	.21
Ado. Omega	.72	.72	.68	.70	.65	.73	.33
Edu. Alpha	.81	.70	.78	.77	.71	.71	.66
Edu. Omega	.85	.77	.82	.84	.77	.76	.72

Table 3  
Informant agreement as indicated by Pearson correlations between the SDQ (total scale, subscales) for self- and observer-report.

SDQ total score	SDQ internal.	Prosocial Behavior	Hyper-activity	Conduct Problems	Emotional Problems	Peer Problems
.27**	.27**	.34**	.28**	.38**	.29**	.23**

Note. \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ .

**DISCUSSION** – These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the SDQ’s psychometric properties, potentially enhancing its applicability and utility in the future. Acceptable informant agreement, alongside correlations with established measures, support its credibility. Notably, **educator-reports outperformed** self-reports, emphasizing the value of multiple informants. However, addressing **reliability issues**, especially with regards to self-report, will be crucial for enhancing effectiveness. Ultimately, the outcome of this study holds the potential to support the establishment of the SDQ as a **useful instrument** for mental health assessment **in alternative care settings** in and outside of Luxembourg.

