# 2024 International Congress of Psychology

## 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 consitency 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.

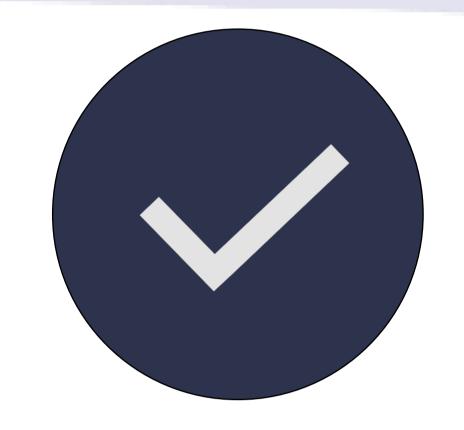




**Internal Consistency** Acceptable



**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 asssess concurrent validity, Pearson correlations were performed in IBM SPSS between SDQ total scores and subscales, for self- and educator- reports. Correlations with SCARED (Birmaheret 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 sured by correlating self-reported SDQ scores of children with observerreported scores by educators on a total scale and subscale level. To achive this, a series of Pearson correlations was carried out utilizing IBM SPSS.



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	d T	.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	t de la companya de l			.25** .21* .24**	.10 002 .14	02 .001 .002
SCARED total scale					.62** .55** .64**	29** 09 39**
SMFQ total scale  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 SDO total score (prosperial hobavior excluded) internalized score self- and observer-report

SDQ total score (prosocial benavior excluded), internalized score self- and observer-report.							
	SDQ total score		Prosocial Behavior		Conduct Problems	Emotional Problems	
Ado. Alpha	.69	.69	.63	.58	.58	.68	.21
Omega	.72	.72	.68	.70	.65	.73	.33
Edu. Alpha	.81	.70	.78	.77	.71	.71	.66
Omega	.85	.77	.82	.84	.77	.76	.72

Table 3 Informant agreement as indicated by Pearson correlations between the CDO (total scale subscales) for solf and observer report

SDQ total	SDQ	Prosocial	Hyper-		Emotional 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.





