Reviewer’s report

Title: Psychometric behaviour of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) in the Spanish National Health Survey 2006

Version: 2 Date: 31 July 2012

Reviewer: Mari Hysing

Reviewer’s report:

The study aims to assess the psychometric properties of the SDQ in a representative sample of Spanish children. The strength of the study is the large sample and well done statistical analyses. The weakness of the study is the introduction leading up to the hypothesis including limited references. I found the article very interesting when I had read it thoroughly, but the authors need to convince the reader already from the introduction.

Introduction

The introduction is short, and while the first paragraph leads well up to the focus of the study, the introduction lacks a short summary of other studies using factor analysis. This is however well covered in the discussion, but would improve the manuscript if including more research in the introduction. Write out more of the Stones et al review results and conclusions would be of interest, and/or some results from some of the studies on factor analysis. One of the main points leading up to the aim of the study is the discrepancies in the factor structure found in a previous Spanish study. However, as my Spanish is not good enough to understand the original article studies referred to, a somewhat more specific description of this discrepancy would be preferred. If there are English versions of the main study this would also be helpful.

A more specified aim/hypothesis of the study would increase interest. The hypothesis underlying the choice of using two different statistical methods for assessing factor structure should be mentioned.

Methods

A description of the sample on characteristics such as socioeconomic status, would be informative. It is stated that the sample is representative, but on what variables this concerns would be helpful. You refer to a publication on the main study, but again this is in Spanish and with a very long web address, hard to reproduce. Because of this a short description of the methods, maybe including a flowchart could improve this section. If other articles in English have been written on this study you could refer to them.

Measures

The description of the SDQ is generally well written. If I understand it correctly the impact section is not included. This could be mentioned. If the standard text is used the symptoms referred to have occurred during the last six months. This
could be stated as it is relevant in relation to the diagnostic definition you use. Concerning the mental disorder a consequent use of terms is recommended. Disorders is generally a better term for mental problems than disease. A short description on how you dichotomized the mental disorder variable could be added after the questions.

Data analysis.
The analysis are well written. However, the description of the mental disorder variable is a little bit confusing and should be detailed. I understand it as an either of the two first questions and then you have to answer yes to the three remaining questions to be defined as having a mental disorder.

Results
A descriptive table including demographic information of the sample could be included as table 1.

As the prevalence of mental disorders are very low, it would be of interest to know more about the numbers. Could gender specific and age-groups be presented on text? This would be helpful in understanding the results even if you use the whole sample in the rest of the analysis.

Discussion
In the present study only symptom scores are included, and from one informant only and the algorithm of probability of diagnosis is not used. I would like to see a discussion of how this may have affected the results.

Some limitations of the study could be included, including the definition of the mental disorders and the use of only one informant.

The discussion of the factor structure is well written. How can your results affect clinical practice and how we interpret research results using this instrument?

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.