



Development of the Preschool Developmental Assessment Scale (PDAS) on children's social development

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ABSTRACT

This paper aimed to describe the design and development of the social domain of the Preschool Developmental Assessment Scale (PDAS), which would be used for assessment of preschool children with different developmental disabilities. The original version of the social domain consisted of 30 items. Children were asked questions about their social development such as their relationship with others, understanding of social norms and rules, empathy and perspective taking. The test was administered to 324 children, including 240 children from preschools and 84 children with developmental disabilities. Rasch analysis was conducted, and all except one item were within the acceptable range of infit statistics. The revised 29-item version could well differentiate between children with typical development and children with developmental disabilities. It could also differentiate between children from different age groups. The revised version was estimated to take around 15 min to administer. The social domain of the PDAS was found to be a direct, quick yet reliable assessment tool for assessing the social development of preschool children.

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1. Introduction

A comprehensive developmental assessment on children should cover a range of domains including cognitive abilities, receptive and expressive language, fine and gross motor skills, visual perception and social-emotional skills (Petermann, 2008).

The aim of the present paper was to describe the development of the social domain of the Preschool Developmental Assessment Scale (PDAS). The PDAS is a screening assessment tool, which covers developmental areas of cognitive, social, language, gross and fine motor skills, visual perception, literacy and numeracy. It is designed to be administered by different professionals such as psychologist, pediatrician, speech therapist, occupational therapist or physiotherapist. Based on PDAS results, preschool children being identified to have developmental problems can be referred to relevant professionals for further assessment.

1.1. Social-emotional development in children

Social-emotional skills in children are crucial to a successful adjustment in life. While many parents focus on cognitive and linguistic development in children, social and emotional domains are also considered very important areas in children's

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development. Children's early social experience contributes to the development of their capacity to build relationship with family or peers, and is also an important foundation for learning (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Social, emotional and behavioral problems are not uncommon in very young children. From literature, prevalence estimates of social, emotional and behavioral problems during infancy or toddler period ranged from 7 to 24%, with the majority falling between 10 and 15% (Briggs-Gowan, Carter, Skuban, & Horwitz, 2001). In the Hong Kong context, statistics from the Child Assessment Service (CAS) of Department of Health of Hong Kong SAR Government showed that the number of children presenting with behavioral and emotional problems referred for assessment was much higher than other developmental problems. In the year 2009, the number accounted for about 32% of the total number referred, and it increased for more than three times from 757 in the year 2008 compared to 2301 in the year 2009.

Literature suggests that the early emerging social-emotional and behavioral problems tend to persist over time. For example, Mathiesen and Sanson (2000) reported that for young children found to have extreme behavioral or emotional problems at 18 months, 37% of them continued to have problems later at 30 months of age. Other studies suggest similar longitudinal stability of these problems as reflected by parents' report of emotional and behavioral problems in children (e.g. Lavigne et al., 1998) and the tendency for these problems to be intensified over time (Walker & Severson, 1995).

Given the remarkable prevalence, persistent nature, and tendency to intensify, early identification and appropriate treatment of the social-emotional and behavioral problems in young children are deemed necessary. An assessment tool with sound psychometric properties could help to achieve these purposes.

1.2. Assessment tools on social and emotional development in children

Many of the existing assessment tools on social and emotional development in children are in the forms of parent or caregiver-report. For example, Carter, Briggs-Gowan, and Davis (2004) discussed some widely used and promising measures on social-emotional, behavioral problems or competence. Of the eight assessment scales mentioned, they are questionnaires or observation items which rely on parents or caregiver as the main respondents. Caselman and Self (2008) in another paper reviewed nine scales measuring preschool children's social-emotional and behavioral development, all of them are parent-, teacher-, or caregiver-report instruments.

The reported social behavior and emotions in children might be subject to high level of bias, including fear of stigma associated with child's mental health problems (Jellinek, Patel, & Froehle, 2003), or possible distortions associated with parental affective symptoms (Briggs-Gowan, Carter, & Schwab-Stone, 1996). For assessment tools on social and emotional development, there is a distinction between measures of "typical" and "maximal" behavior (Wigelsworth, Humphrey, Kalambouka, & Lendrum, 2010). Measures of "typical" behavior can be attained by self- and informant-report; whereas measures of "maximal" behavior require the respondent to complete a task which directly measures the underlying construct in question. The correlation between "typical" and "maximal" behavior is usually very small (Humphrey et al., 2008; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003), meaning that what was reported and what was measured directly might be discrepant. Thus a direct measure on the child's knowledge and behavior supplementary to information from main caregiver can help to derive a more accurate picture of the child's social development.

Apart from parents' or caregivers' report, child version is also available in some instruments. The most detailed information might be available by asking children to rate their own behavior. Yet, it is generally believed that older children and adolescents, with better self-awareness and increasingly differentiated self-concept, are likely to be more accurate respondents than younger children (Denham, 2005). Humphrey, Kalambouka, Lendrum, and Wigelsworth (2009), in a systematic review, listed twenty-three measures on social and emotional skills for children, and child version is available for twenty of them. However, most of them target at children of school age or above, and limited number of assessment tools cover preschool children.

The present paper aims at describing the development, validity and reliability of the social domain of the PDAS, in which the preschool children are directly assessed on their social-emotional development by asking questions on their social relationships, understanding of social norms and rules, empathy and perspective taking ability. It is hoped that the social domain of the PDAS could provide information from the child's side, which might supplement the parent's or caregiver's report, in the assessment of social-emotional development in preschool children.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A total of 324 children participated in this study, aged from 3 years 4 months to 6 years 3 months, with 162 boys and 162 girls. The children were recruited from three age groups (i.e. 3 years 4 months to 4 years 3 months, 4 years 4 months to 5 years 3 months, and 5 years 4 months to 6 years 3 months), with 108 children and equal number of boys and girls in each group.

Among these 324 children, 240 were recruited through eight preschools (preschool group) from four districts in Hong Kong with different socioeconomic status as measured by median monthly household income based on the 2008 Census information (Census and Statistics Department, 2009). There were 18 districts in Hong Kong and the four districts chosen included the districts with highest and lowest median monthly household income, a district that ranked 6th and another that

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