

This study consisted of two stages, the first of which aimed to identify emotional and behavioural problems specific to young children with autism using the Developmental Behaviour Checklist (DBC-P) and develop a potential screening tool for autism in children with developmental delay aged 18 - 48 months. The second stage of the study evaluated the efficacy of this screening tool.

Stage 1

Subjects were 60 children with autism and developmental delay and 60 children with developmental delay without autism. Features were identified which differentiated the children with autism from those with developmental delay without autism. Analyses revealed that a 17-item version of the DBC-P performed well as a screening tool for autism, with an AUC of 0.874, sensitivity of 0.8750, and specificity of 0.6909. The DBC-P offers a potential simple and inexpensive method of screening at risk populations of preschool children with developmental delay for autism, thus facilitating timely referral to scarce specialist autism diagnostic services.

Stage 2

The ability to identify children who require specialist assessment for the possibility of autism at as early an age as possible has become a growing area of research. To this end, a number of assessment measures have been developed as potential screening tools for autism. The reliability and validity of one of these proposed measures for screening for autism in very young children with developmental problems was evaluated. The parents of a total of 207 children aged 20-51 months completed the Developmental Checklist-Early Screen (DBC-ES), prior to their child commencing assessment. Good reliability in terms of interrater agreement and internal consistency was reported, along with significant correlations with a clinician completed measure of autism symptomatology. High sensitivity was found, with lower specificity for both the originally proposed 17-item screening tool and a very brief 5-item version. The characteristics of the false negative and false positive screens are explored. The DBC-ES has potential as a Level 1 screening tool for autism in young children with developmental delay.

References

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