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*Specializing in Firesetting Behavior
Assessment • Training • Research*

**Lambie, I., & Krynen, A. (2017). The utility of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire as a screening measure among children and adolescents who light fires. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 28(3), 313-330
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Background Information

- Many young firesetters are seen to commit general offences throughout adolescence and early adulthood.
- Firesetting has been linked to history of trauma, a diminished ability to adequately regulate emotions, family dysfunction, and the presence of mental health and psychological problems such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and Conduct Disorder.
- Current interventions for child and adolescent firesetters are predominantly provided by fire services, and typically involve education around fire knowledge and safety skills.

Present study:

- Examine the utility of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) as a screening tool for emotional, behavioral and peer relationship difficulties among the young firesetting population.
- Hypothesizes that young firesetters will be at higher risk of having clinically significant externalizing difficulties compared to Black et al. (2010) sample.* in particular conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, as well as peer relationship problems.

Method

- 57 children and adolescents, aged between 6 and 17 years old
- Sample taken from Central Region of the New Zealand FAIP for firesetting behavior; participants were referred and treated over a 6 month period.
- Mean age of sample was 12.58 years.
- 89.5% of participants were boys

Measures

- The SDQ is a brief screening scale for emotional and behavioral problems among young people aged 4-17 years.
- The SDQ has 25-items which can be divided into five scales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention difficulties, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviors.
- For 98% of sample, the parent-report version of the SDQ was complete.
- Where possible, teacher- and self-report versions of the SDQ were also completed.

Results

Firesetters aged 6-10 years

- Based on parent-report, most firesetters had total difficulties scores that fell in the abnormal range (56%)
- Many young firesetters were at substantial risk of having clinically significant problems of some sort

Firesetters aged 11-13 years

- For both the parent- and self-report versions, the total difficulties scores for a large proportion of firesetters aged 11-13 years fell in the abnormal range (78.6% and 27.3% respectively)
- Many firesetters were at substantial risk of having clinically significant problems of some nature.

• Firesetters aged 14-17 years

- The percentage of firesetters aged 14-17 years whose total difficulties scores for the parent- and self-report versions fell in the abnormal range (40% and 15%, respectively).
- Some firesetters were at substantial risk of having clinically significant problems of some sort.

• Comparison between firesetter groups

- No significant differences were found between the three firesetter subgroups across all parent-report subscale and total difficulties score.

• Comparison between firesetters and Black et al., 2010 samples

- Firesetters aged 13-17 years had significantly higher total difficulties, conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention difficulties self-report mean scores than the Black et al. (2010) sample.
- There was no significant differences between samples for mean scores across the emotional, peer problems or prosocial subscales.
- No significant differences were found between groups for emotional symptoms, peer relationship problems and prosocial behavioral problems.
- Peer relationship problems did not significantly differ between groups.

Abstract completed by Alaina Millard