

# Validity and Reliability of Three Assessment Instruments for Identification of Trauma Symptomatology in Young Children

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**Background:** An increasing body of research has established that young children who experience trauma risk developing trauma symptomatology such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other comorbid affective and behavioral symptomatology. Developmentally-sensitive, standardized, and validated assessment instruments are needed within the clinical field to identify young children who suffer from trauma symptomatology.

**Aim:** To translate, adapt, and validate three standardized, developmentally-sensitive assessment instruments for preschool and young school children who have been exposed to trauma; the Darryl cartoon test, the Odense Child Trauma Screening (OCTS), and the Diagnostic Infant and Preschool Assessment (DIPA).



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## Darryl

**Instrument:** A questionnaire for assessment of symptoms of PTSD. Questions and answers are written in text and illustrated in pictures.

**Age group:** 6-12+ year old children.

**Method:** 65 children (7-17 yrs) answered the Darryl and were interviewed with the Clinician Administered PTSD Scale for Children and Adolescents (CAPS-CA). The performance of the Darryl in terms of sensitivity and specificity was assessed using different cut-off scores.

### Results:

Internal consistency Darryl,  $\alpha = .88$

Pearson's <i>r</i> correlations	
	Darryl total PTSD
CAPS-CA total PTSD	.73*

\* $p < 0.001$ .

When the Darryl is used as a screening tool for PTSD, a cut-off score of 15 yields a high sensitivity of 90% and a specificity of 65%.

## OCTS

**Instrument:** A story stem screening, i.e. a structured play assessment, with a doll house and family figures. The OCTS is developed to screen for behavioral and play-based indicators of traumatization in children.

**Age group:** 4-8 year old children.

**Method:** 49 children participated in the OCTS; an at-risk sample of 31 children who had experienced trauma and a community sample of 18 children. Caregivers were interviewed with the DIPA and filled out the SDQ.

### Results:

Internal consistency total OCTS:  $\alpha = .95$

Inter-rater reliability: ICC = .98

Spearman's <i>rho</i> correlations	
	Total OCTS score
DIPA PTSD	.37*
SDQ total	.34*

\* $p < .05$ .

## DIPA

**Instrument:** A semi-structured caregiver interview, that can assess symptoms of 13 different disorders, including PTSD.

**Age group:** 1-6 year old children.

**Method:** 62 caregivers of preschool-aged children were interviewed with the DIPA and filled out the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

### Results:

Internal consistency DIPA PTSD,  $\alpha = .82$

Spearman's <i>rho</i> correlations	
	DIPA PTSD
SDQ total	.38*
SDQ emotional symptoms	.54*

\* $p < .01$ .

## Conclusion

The studies provide initial support for the validity and reliability of the Darryl, the OCTS, and the DIPA. Implementation of such age-appropriate measures for young children, who have experienced trauma, in research and clinical practice will help psychologists and our society in early and confident identification of trauma-exposed children who are symptomatic. This identification is the first step to ensure that the children and their family get the help they need.