

Title: Professor & Pediatrician
First name: Anneli
Last name: Ivarsson
Institution: Epidemiology & Global Health, Umeå University
Country: Sweden
City: Umeå
Phone: +46703557746
Email: anneli.ivarsson@umu.se
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Abstract title: Socio-emotional problems in 3-year old children – ASQ:SE used in a population-based study

Background: Mental health is a public health challenge also among children. Increased knowledge will guide evidence-based health-promoting interventions and early identification for adequate parental support. The aim of this study was to describe mental health in terms of socio-emotional problems among 3-year-old boys and girls and relate this to family characteristics and urban or rural living area.

Method: Within Child Health Care (CHC) in Västerbotten (Sweden) the 3-year-olds' health check-up includes parent-rating of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional (ASQ:SE). Total score 0-465 where high values indicate socio-emotional problems, and the suggested cut-off 59 was used. Cross-sectional descriptive and comparative analyses were performed.

Results: ASQ:SE for the years 2014-2017 for 7179 3-year-olds (boys 3719 & girls 3460), response rate 70%. Most children lived with both parents (92%), had siblings (75%), and lived in urban areas (69%). Boys scored higher (mean 31, SD 25) than girls (mean 24, SD 21). Out of all children 9% scored above the cut-off, boys 12% and girls 6% ($p < 0.000$). Problems were more common in single-parent and one-child families (both $p < 0.000$), while no difference was found between the urban and rural areas.

Discussion: Most 3-year-olds had a good parental reported socio-emotional health. However, problems were reported for about every 10th child, twice so for boys compared to girls, and more often in single-parent and single child families. Thus, already in pre-school age socio-emotional problems should be given attention, preferably by a systematic strategy.

Eva Eurenus¹, Linda Richter Sundberg¹, Masoud Vaezghasemi^{1,2}, Sven-Arne Silfverdal³, Anneli Ivarsson¹, Marie Lindkvist^{1,4}

Authors, Institutions:
1. Department of Public health and Clinical Medicine, Epidemiology and Global Health, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden
2. Department of Social Work, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden
3. Department of Clinical Science, Pediatrics, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden
4. Department of Statistics, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden