Title: Assessing Risk for Social Victimization: Validation of the Social Vulnerability Questionnaire

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Introduction: Despite the heightened exposure to social victimization experienced by individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), few measures are available to specifically identify potential risk factors related to social vulnerability. The Social Vulnerability Questionnaire (SVQ; Fisher et al., 2012) was developed to measure the social vulnerability of individuals with IDD. The initial exploratory factor analysis of the SVQ yielded 6 factors (Emotional Bullying, Risk Awareness, Social Protection, Vulnerable Appearance, Parent Protection, and Credulity) accounting for 49.1% of the variance. Since its introduction, the SVQ has been used to identify patterns of social vulnerability among different forms of IDD (Fisher et al., 2013) and it has been requested by service providers for use to identify risk within clients. As this measure becomes more widely used, it is important to confirm its factor structure and validity for assessing social vulnerability of individuals with IDD.

Method: To confirm the factor structure of the SVQ, 488 parents/caregivers of individuals with IDD (mean age 21.38 [SD = 8.03], range 12 – 53 years) were recruited through emails sent to disability organizations nationwide. The majority of diagnoses included Williams syndrome (WS; n = 134) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD; n = 101). The remaining 193 diagnoses included Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, Cri du Chat syndrome, unspecified intellectual, developmental, or learning disability, and “other health concerns.” The sample was 60% male (n= 254), 85% Caucasian (n = 335) and 83% (n = 352) lived with their parents. Parents were asked to rate the 30 items of the SVQ on a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = not true or never to 4 = very true or always) based on their child’s behavior within the past year.

Results: The initial principal axis factor analysis with promax rotation yielded clean discrimination for 25 items; these items had one factor loading > |.5|, with all other loadings < |.3|. One additional item had a factor loading of .38. Four items revealed weak and inconclusive factor loadings. The six-factor structure accounted for 59.48% of the variance, with 25 factors each contributing at least 5% to the total accounted variance. Restricting the sample to just those with ASD (n = 101), WS (n = 134), and DS (n = 34) (e.g., the three largest diagnostic groups), a discriminate function analysis was performed using the six factors of the SVQ as predictors of diagnostic category. Two discriminate functions were calculated, both with strong associations between groups and predictors ($\chi^2 (12) = 176.71, p < .01$ for both functions included and $\chi^2 (5) = 24.02, p < .01$ with the first discriminate function removed). The first discriminate function accounted for 89.2% of the between-group variability and distinguished ASD from WS and DS; compared to individuals with WS or DS, individuals with ASD had higher scores on social protection (10.30 and 9.14 vs. 12.10, respectively) and lower scores on vulnerable appearance (12.13 and 13.68 vs. 9.74, respectively). The second function accounted for 10.8% of the variability and distinguished between individuals with WS and DS; individuals with WS had higher scores on credulity (13.63 vs. 12.62) and parental independence (6.22 vs. 5.87) and lower scores on emotional abuse (8.53 vs. 9.33) and risk awareness (18.85 vs. 19.90) compared to DS. Follow up classification analysis indicated that 69.5% of cases were correctly classified by scores on the SVQ, with 77.6% of WS correctly classified, 75.2% of ASD, and 20.6% of DS.

Discussion: The SVQ is one of the only measures available to assess social vulnerability for individuals with IDD. The current results further validate the SVQ by confirming the factor structure with a large sample of individuals with IDD. The discriminate function analysis is used as further validation, indicating that 5 of the 6 factors are important in differentiating patterns of social vulnerability for individuals with WS, ASD, and DS. Future research will explore the clinical applications of the SVQ.

References/Citations: