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PUBERTAL DEVELOPMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS: PRELIMINARY DATA IN A PORTUGUESE SAMPLE OF 11-15 YEARS-OLD STUDENTS

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Introduction: Assessment of mental health in children and adolescents usually takes into account demographic factors such as age and sex. However, much fewer data exist concerning pubertal development.

Aims: to develop a consistent Portuguese version of a brief self-rating scale of pubertal development (SPD, Carskadon, Acebo, 1993, adapt. from Patersen et al, 1988 based on Tanner stages), and to examine whether psychopathological symptoms in 5th to 9th grades students vary according to their pubertal status.

Methods: After informed consent by students and their parents, a convenience sample of 138 students (68 M), 11-15 yr-old ($M = 12.55$, $SD = 1.54$), completed the Portuguese versions of the SPD and of the YSR Achenbach inventory of psychological symptoms.

Results: Cronbach alphas for the SPD were .81 (boys) and .70 (girls); corrected item-total correlations ranged from .43 to .67. In boys, age was inversely associated with YSR-scale IV scores, and puberty scores were correlated with YSR-scale VII (at least $p < .05$). In girls, numerous significant associations emerged between puberty scores and YSR scales, specifically scales II, V, VI, VII, VIII, externalizing and internalizing, whereas only YSR scale VI was significantly associated with age.

Conclusions: Preliminary results suggest adequate internal consistency of the Portuguese version of the SPD. There were several associations between pubertal status and psychopathological symptoms, especially in girls. These findings suggest that pubertal status should be considered when screening youth mental health, and in planning health education programs. [SUPPORT: SPD and YSR costs supported by FCT/COMPETE Research Project PTDC/PSI-EDD/120003/2010, and by the Dep. Education, Univ. Aveiro, Clinical Psychology Master Degree]