This paper reports on the development of a scale to identify a child's emotional and behavioral skills, competencies, and characteristics, the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale: A Strength-Based Approach to Assessment (BERS). The BERS is a 52-item scale that identifies strengths in five areas: interpersonal strengths, family involvement, intrapersonal strengths, school functioning, and affective strengths. This paper describes development of norms for children without disabilities as well as for children with emotional or behavioral disorders, results of factor analyses, studies of the scale's concurrent and construct validity, and reliability studies. The paper suggests that the BERS is suitable for five uses: (1) to identify children with limited emotional and behavioral strengths; (2) to target goals for an individual treatment plan or individual educational plan; (3) to identify strengths and weaknesses for treatment; (4) to document progress in a strength area as a consequence of specialized treatment or services; and (5) to measure strengths in research and evaluation projects.
The Development of a Scale to Assess the Emotional and Behavioral Strengths of Children

Introduction

Many of the behavior assessment scales currently used in mental health, child welfare, and special education are deficit oriented. While these scales are helpful for identifying children in need, they may not be helpful in developing a child's treatment plan or goals. However, strength-based assessment can be used to identify a child's skills and resources, and therefore be useful in developing his/her treatment plans and goals.

Strength-based assessment is defined as the measurement of those emotional and behavioral skills, competencies, and characteristics that create a sense of personal accomplishment, contribute to satisfying relationships with family members, peers, and adults, enhance one's ability to deal with adversity and stress, and promote one's personal, social, and academic development.

The Behavior and Emotion Rating Scale: A Strength-Based Approach to Assessment (BERS; Epstein & Sharma, 1997) was developed to provide professionals with a valid and reliable strength-based assessment instrument. The BERS is a 52-item scale that identifies children's emotional and behavioral strengths in five areas: interpersonal strengths, family involvement, intrapersonal strengths, school functioning, and affective strengths. The scale is designed for parents, teachers, counselors, caregivers, and direct service providers to complete on children with whom they work. Each item is comprised of a statement
describing a strength a child may demonstrate. The
respondent then rates the child on a Likert-type
scale in terms of how well the item describes the
child (0 = Not at All Like the Child to 3 = Very Much
Like the Child). Completion time is approximately 10-15
minutes. The item scores are then summed to
determine the child's 5 subtest scores and total
strength score. The norms, reliability, and validity of
the BERS have been established.

Norms

In the winter and spring, 1996, efforts were
made to establish norms for the BERS. Several
hundred teachers, counselors, and clinicians nationwide
were asked to complete the BERS for children with
whom they work. Ratings were received on a
national sample of 2,100 children without disabilities
and 800 children with emotional and behavioral
disorders. The sample selection procedures resulted
in a normative sample that was representative of the
nation as a whole. Based on these data, age and
gender norms for children without disabilities (5-18
years of age) were established, as well as norms for
children with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Factor structure

Factor analytic procedures were conducted to
determine the dimensions of emotional and behavioral
strength measured by the BERS. First, using the data
set from the 2,100 children without disabilities who
had completed BERS, oblique factor analyses with
factors set at 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 were conducted. A
review of these analyses indicated several low
loading items, factors with four or fewer items, and
a few non-meaningful, difficult to interpret factors.
Then, a second set of factor analyses was run with
eigenvalues set at 1.2, item loadings set at .40, and
five items set as the minimum number of items in
any factor. Based on these criteria five meaningful
factors were identified. Then, several items were
removed because they were redundant, overlapped
with other items, or did not contribute to the factor.
Fifty-two items remained following this review. A
final factor analysis was conducted with these items
and led to the identification of 5 factors: interpersonal
strengths, family involvement, intrapersonal
strengths, school functioning, and affective
strengths. The factors and item loadings are pre-
sented in Table 1.

Validity

In spring and summer, 1996, three studies were
conducted to assess the concurrent validity of the
BERS. For each study, teachers completed the BERS
and either The Teacher Report Form (Achenbach, 1991),
a measure of emotional and behavioral problems
(N=84), the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter,
1985), a measure examining children’s global self-
esteeem (N=78), or the Walker-McConnell Scale of Social
Competence and School Adjustment (Walker &
McConnell, 1988), a measure of social skills and social
competence (N=71). Correlational analyses indicated a
moderate to high relationship between the BERS and
three other measures. Construct validity was deter-
mined by comparing the mean standard scores of the
two groups used to norm the BERS. Overall, children
with emotional and behavioral disorders scored one
standard deviation lower than the children without
disabilities. Results of the T-test indicated that these
differences were statistically significant.

Reliability

In spring and summer, 1996, two reliability
studies were conducted to assess the inter-rater
reliability and the test-retest reliability of the BERS.
In the inter-rater reliability study, teachers and
aides/student teachers were asked to complete the
BERS on their students. Data from 9 pairs of raters
on 96 students with emotional and behavioral
disorders were collected. Pearson correlation
coefficients were calculated on the two groups of
raters on the five subscores and total strength scores
on the BERS. Correlations were between .83 and .98.
### Table 1
Factors and Loadings of the Items of the BERS (Decimals Omitted)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Interpersonal Strength</th>
<th>Family Involvement</th>
<th>Intrapersonal Strength</th>
<th>School Functioning</th>
<th>Affective Strength</th>
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<td>Item</td>
<td>Load</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Load</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>69</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>20.</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>18.</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>22.</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>28.</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>23.</td>
<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>29.</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>26.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
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<td>35.</td>
<td>86</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>36.</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>30.</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>37.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>32.</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>38.</td>
<td>58</td>
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<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>83</td>
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### Table 2
**Correlation Coefficients Between the BERS and the Walker-McConnell**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self Control</th>
<th>Peer Relations</th>
<th>School Adjustment</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>.72</td>
<td>.72</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.37</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.35</td>
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<td>Intrapersonal Strength</td>
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<td>.50</td>
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<td>.65</td>
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<td>School Functioning</td>
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<td>.42</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective Strength</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Table 3
**Correlation Coefficients Between the BERS and the Self-Perception Profile for Children**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Scholastic Competence</th>
<th>Behavioral Conduct</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Strength</td>
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<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Involvement</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal Strength</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Functioning</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Strength</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4
**Correlation Coefficients Between the BERS and the Achenbach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Internalizing</th>
<th>Externalizing</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>-.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Involvement</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>-.42</td>
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<td>Intrapersonal Strength</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Functioning</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-.47</td>
<td>-.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective Strength</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>-.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-.72</td>
<td>-.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the test-retest reliability, 59 students with serious emotional disturbance were rated twice by their teachers over a two-week interval. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated on the two groups of ratings on the five subscores and total strength score on the BERS. Correlations ranged between .85 to .99.

**Uses**

The BERS has five principal uses: to identify children with limited emotional and behavioral strengths; to target goals for an individual treatment plan or individual educational plan; to identify strengths and weaknesses for treatment; to document progress in a strength area as a consequence of specialized treatment or services; and to measure strengths in research and evaluation projects.

**References**


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