How are you now? Follow-up study of the children who have attended an Early Childhood Unit consultation in 2008, 2009 and 2010

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Introduction and Objective: “Unidade da Primeira Infância” (UPI) is a specialized unit in infant and early childhood mental health. Founded in March, 1983, it emerged as a place focused on the clinical study of babies’ behaviour, infant psychopathology and interaction between parents and babies. Nowadays, UPI provides intervention (preventive and therapeutic) for young children aged from zero to three and their parents or caregivers. The systematic research in this early age is still very limited and there is little information about the future impact of psychopathology diagnosed at this age. Thus, the aim of this study is to know, through five years follow-up, what is the evolution of the children whose first observation took place in this unit in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

Methods: The sample used in this study consists of children aged from zero to three years old whose first observation took place in UPI in 2008, 2009 and 2010. The data used to characterize our sample were obtained by consulting the clinical record. The following parameters were considered: Age at the time of the first psychiatric observation; gender; diagnosis according to DC 0-3R (Axis I and II); therapeutic intervention and duration of the intervention. An interview with the main caregivers was made, by telephone, which involved applying an appropriate follow-up questionnaire, which included completing the SDQ scale - version for parents.

Results: The results were submitted to a statistical analysis using SPSS. The rate of responders was approximately 64% from a total N of 301. Everyone that we were able to reach (n=192) agreed to participate in the study. From those, 91,6% are satisfied with the quality of the service provided and 85% refer to clinical improvement of the child. According to DC 0-3R, Relating and Communicating Disorders was the most common diagnosis on Axis I (19,3%), and Underinvolved relationship was the most frequent one in Axis II (18,8%). 31,8% had abnormal results on SDQ, and there was a significant association between Regulation Disorders of Sensory Processing and abnormal results on SDQ hyperactivity and behavior problems subscales. Learning disabilities are more common among those with more severe cases of Relating and Communicating Disorders.
Conclusion: Early and adequate intervention seems to have an important and positive impact in prognosis of the children referred to an early childhood psychiatry consultation. The children diagnosed with Regulation Disorders of Sensory Processing before the age of three seem to have more behaviour and hyperactivity related problems during school years, suggesting an associations between these disorders. Further investigation in early childhood psychopathology and its impact in the future of the child and family must be done.