Mental health and quality of life in deaf pupils.

In the past decade, the living conditions of hearing impaired children have been changing due to new technologies and mainstreaming in schools. The majority of population-based studies in deaf pupils were conducted before these changes started to take place. The present study aimed to evaluate the current situation regarding aspects of mental health and, for the first time, quality of life in a representative sample of deaf pupils. The sample stems from a population of 145,000 pupils attending the first to ninth grades during the school years 2003-2005 in Upper Austria. From 186 children with bilateral hearing impairment of at least 40 dB registered at the centre for special education for children with sensory impairments, 99 with a performance IQ above 70 were included in the present study. Parents and teachers completed the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ), while parents and children were administered the inventory for the assessment of the quality of life in children and adolescents (ILC). Results indicated that deaf children scored significantly higher on the SDQ than their counterparts from normative samples according to both parent and teacher ratings. Differences were most marked with regard to conduct problems, emotional problems, and peer problems, and less marked for hyperactivity/inattention. While parents of deaf children had a generally positive view of their children's quality of life, deaf children provided a more
complex picture, stressing areas of dissatisfaction. Mental health and quality of life were found to be unrelated to the child's degree of deafness.