

The mental health of New Zealand preschool children

Strengths and Difficulties
questionnaire at 4 - 5 years

B4 School Check

“ We want our children... to grow up competent and confident, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.”

From Te Whariki, Ministry of Education





B4 School Check

- The B4School check is the 8th “core” Well Child check
- The purpose is
 - Health education relevant to preschool children
 - Early identification of health, behavioural or developmental issues
 - Ensure appropriate supports are in place prior to starting school
- It involves:
 - An opportunity for parents to ask questions and get advice about their child from a trained nurse.
 - A comprehensive health, behavioural and developmental check
 - Collection of information about the health and wellbeing of 4 year old children
 - Referral of children with newly identified issues or concerns

Evidence-based content

- Hearing assessment
- Vision assessment
- Height, weight (BMI)
- Dental assessment (lift the lip)
- Questionnaires on behaviour and development
- Questionnaire health issues, social issues, development (e.g. chronic illness, immunisation, disability, learning & communication, nutrition, relationships, safety)
- Health promotion, support, immunisation check

Ethnicity	Percent
New Zealand European/Pakeha	61
European Not Further Defined	3
Other European	3
NZ Maori	17
Cook Islands Maori	1
Samoan	3
Tongan	1
South East Asian	1
Indian	3
Chinese	2
Asian Not Further Defined	1
Other Asian	1
African	1
Other	2
Grand Total	100

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

- The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire about 3-16 year olds.
- It is available in 62 languages
- The correlation (total scores) of the parental SDQ and the Child Behavior Checklist is around 0.75

The SDQ

- All versions of the SDQ ask about 25 attributes, some positive and others negative.
- These 25 items are divided between 5 scales:
 - emotional symptoms
 - conduct problems
 - hyperactivity/inattention
 - peer relationship problems
 - prosocial behaviour
- Scores are added together to generate a total difficulties score (based on 20 items)
- There is a parent and teacher version which should be considered together

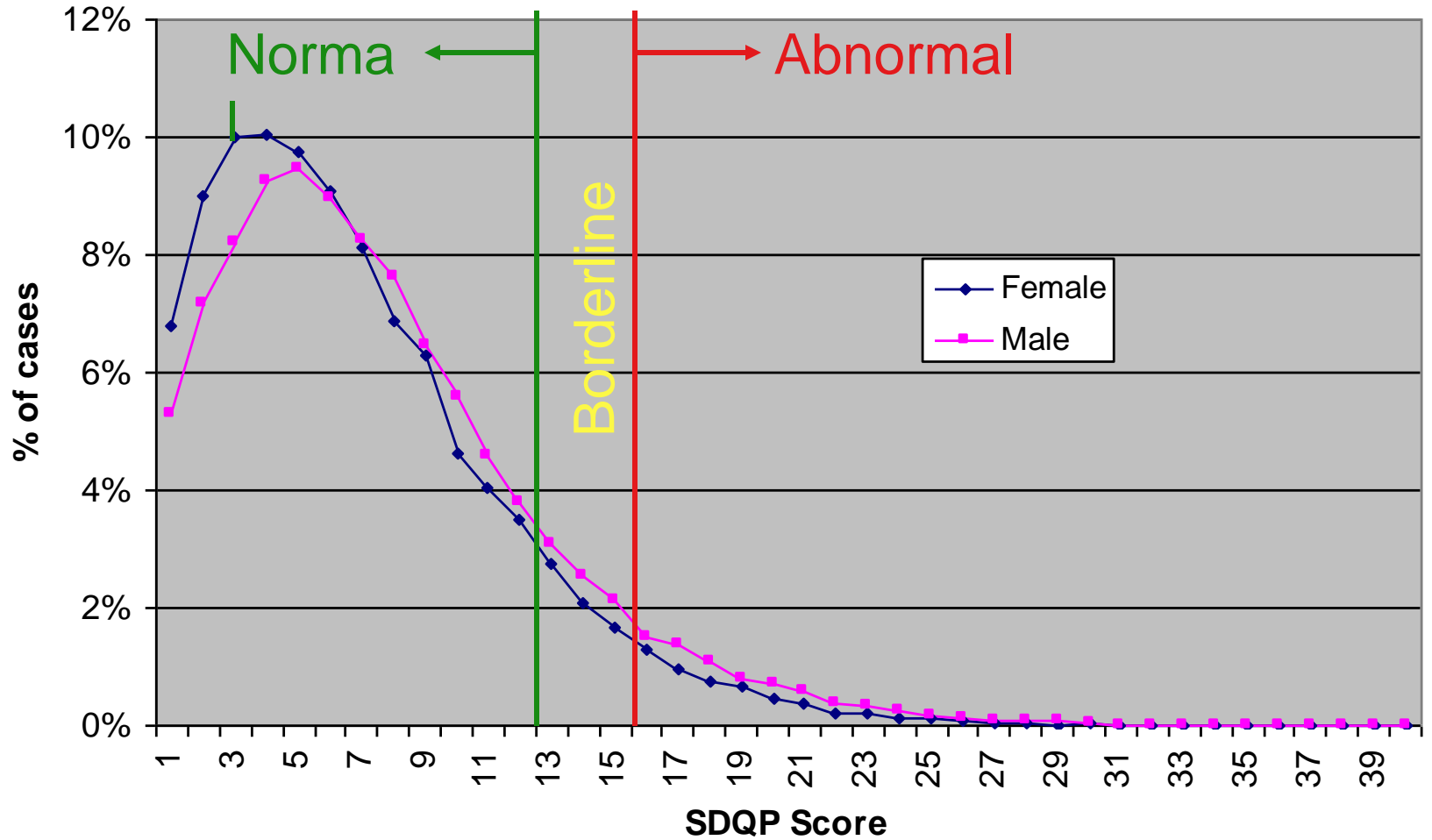
International comparisons

	New Zealand	Australia	Britain	USA
SDQ - P	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Total	7.3	8.2	8.6	7.4
Emotional	2.2	2.1	1.9	1.5
Conduct	2.5	1.5	1.6	1.4
Attention	3.2	3.1	3.6	3.2
Peer	2.1	1.6	1.4	1.3
Prosocial	8.4	8.3	8.6	8.4

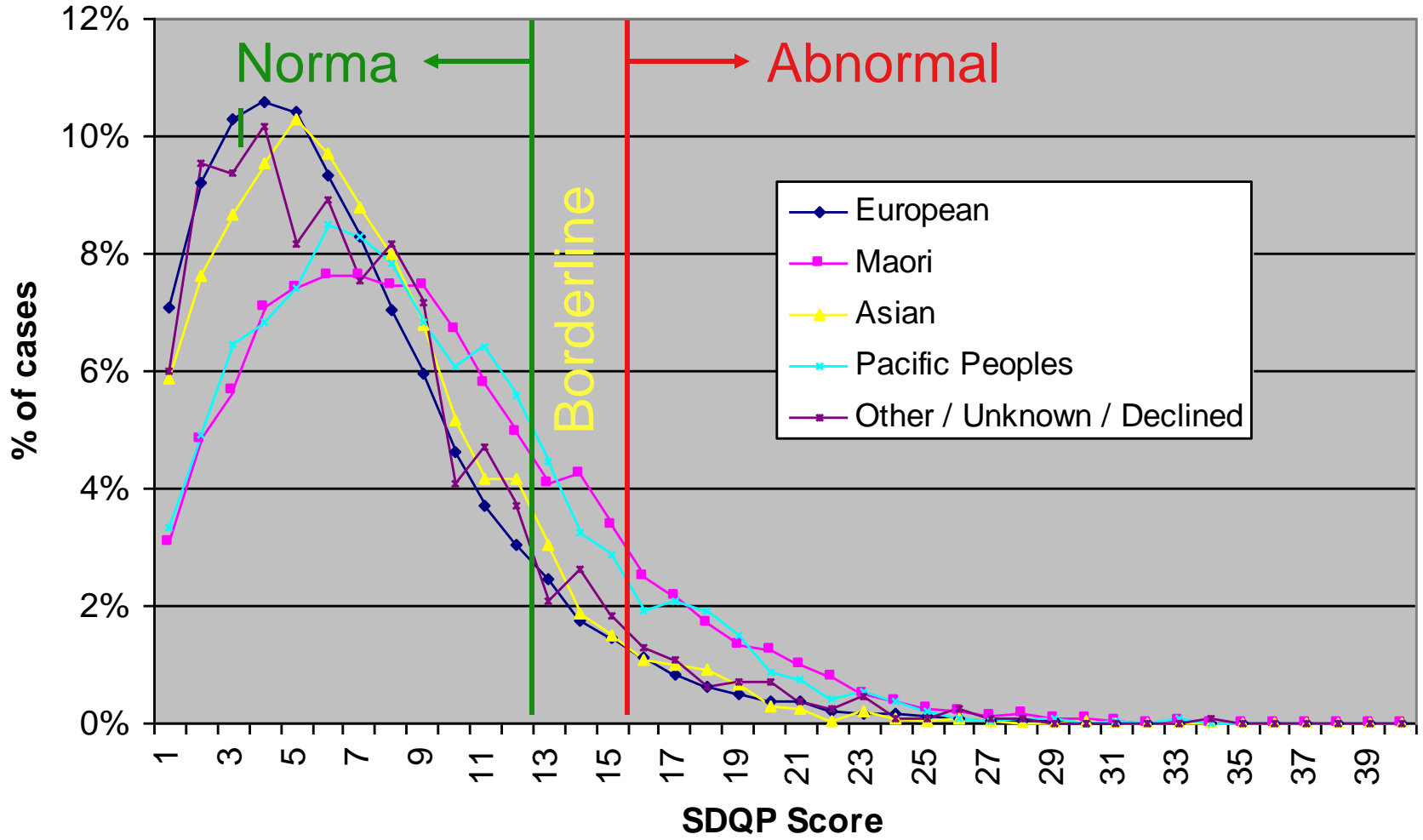
Cut-off points for SDQ

Parent completed	Normal	Borderline	Abnormal
Total difficulties	0-13	14-16	17-40
Emotional symptoms	0-3	4	5-10
Conduct problems	0-2	3	4-10
Hyperactivity	0-5	6	7-10
Peer problems	0-2	3	4-10
Teacher completed			
Total difficulties	0-11	12-15	16-40
Emotional symptoms	0-4	5	6-10
Conduct problems	0-2	3	4-10
Hyperactivity	0-5	6	7-10
Peer problems	0-3	4	5-10

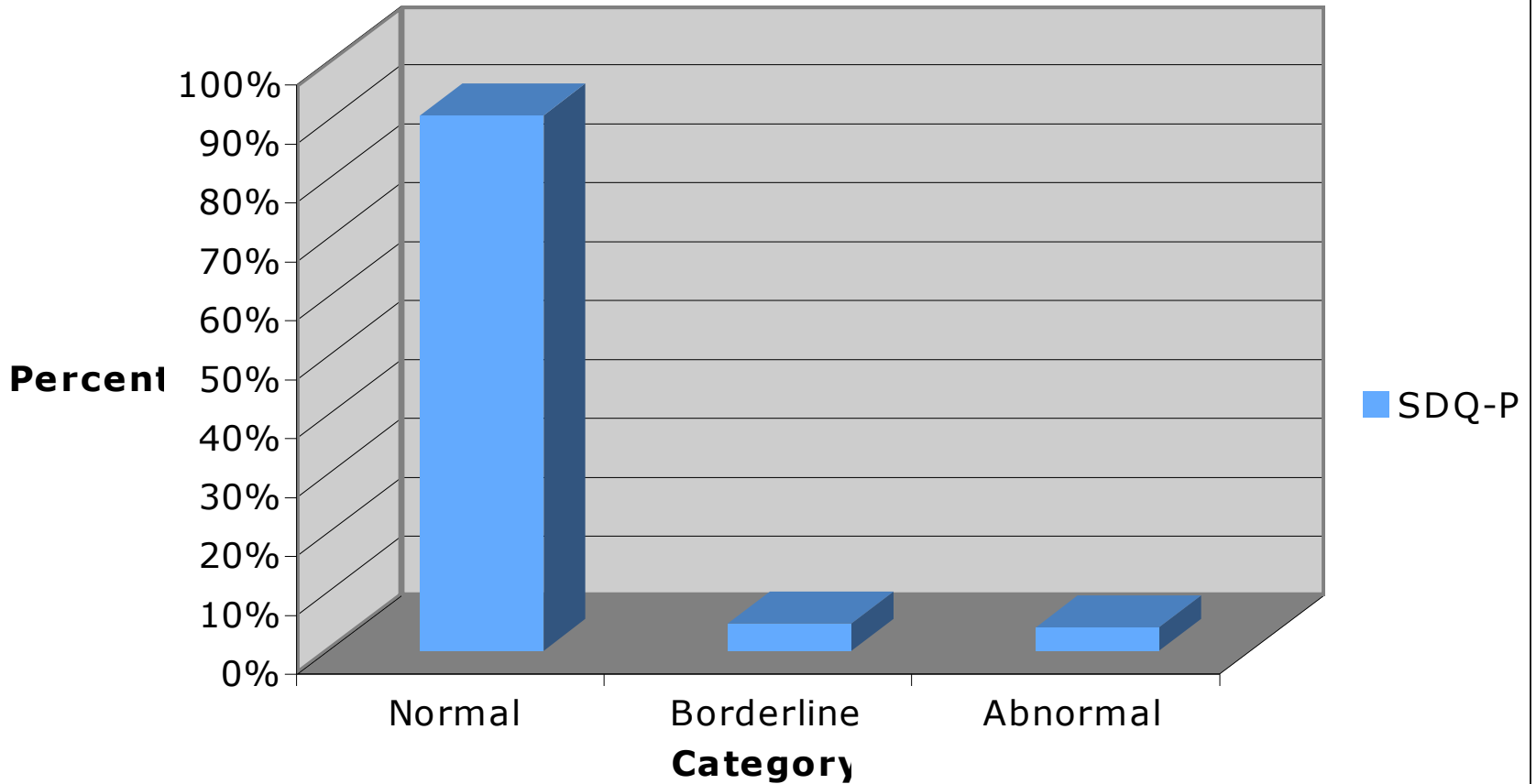
SDQ-P score distribution by Gender



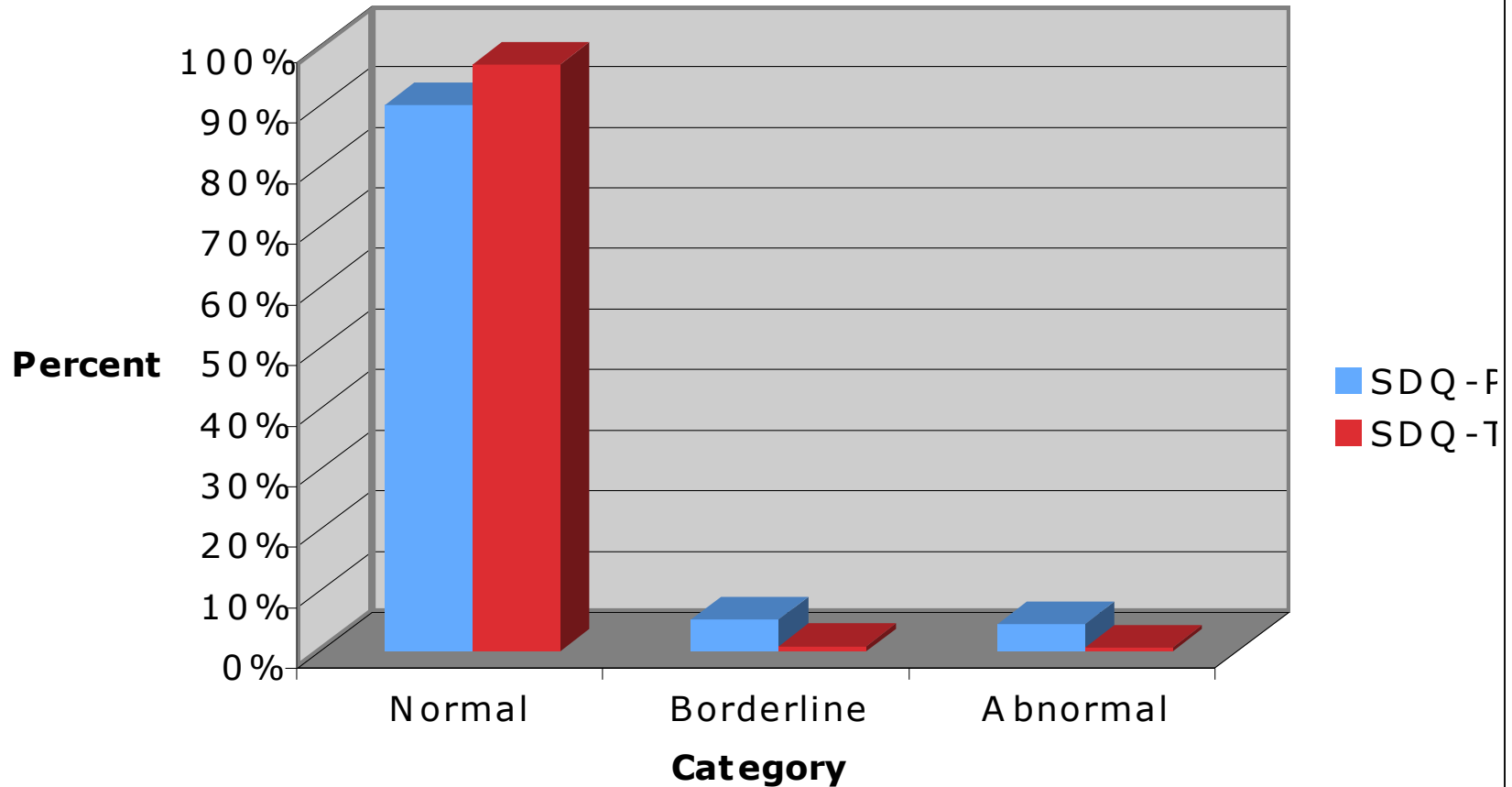
SDQ-P score distribution by Ethnicity



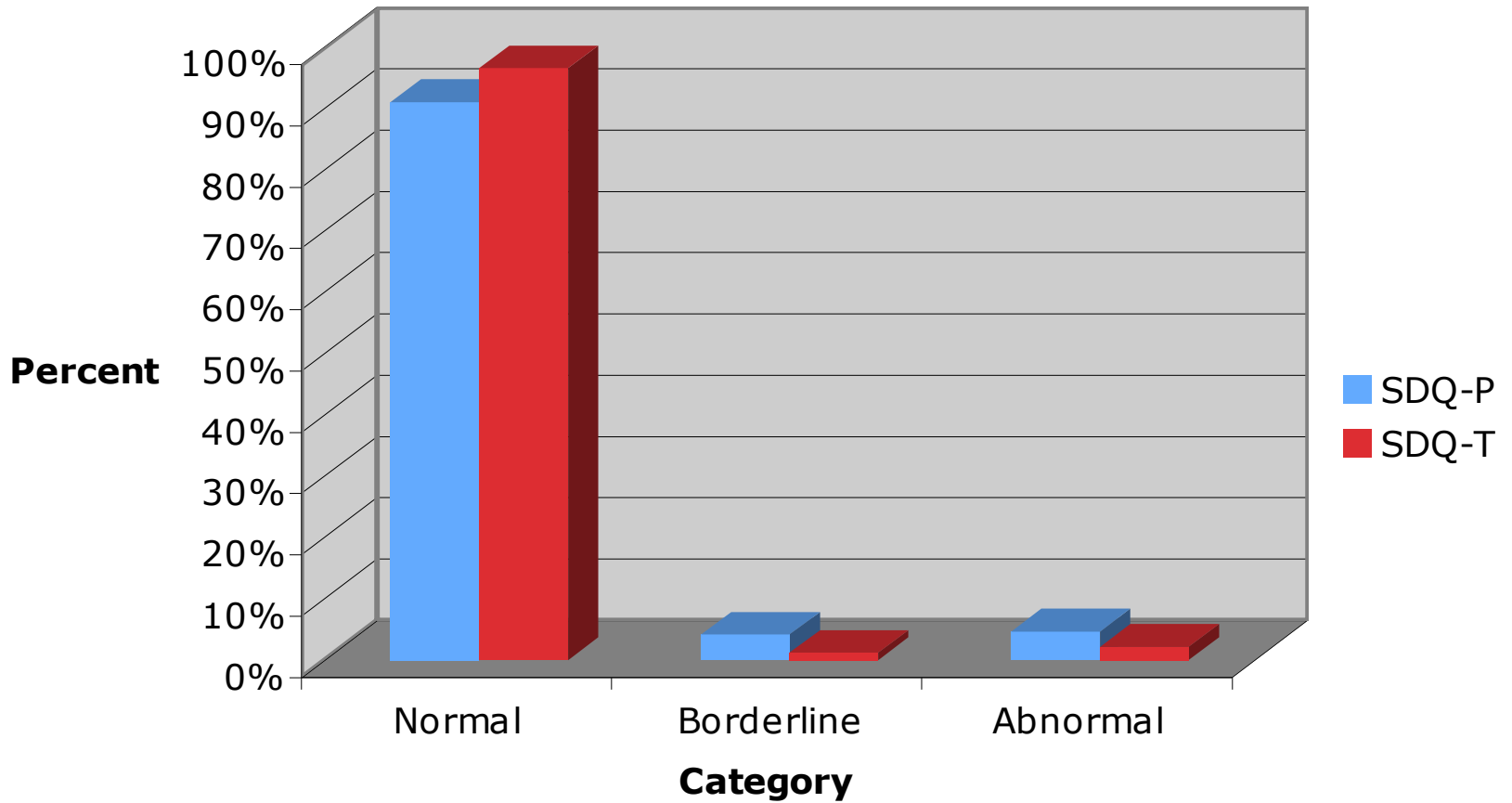
Prosocial behaviour



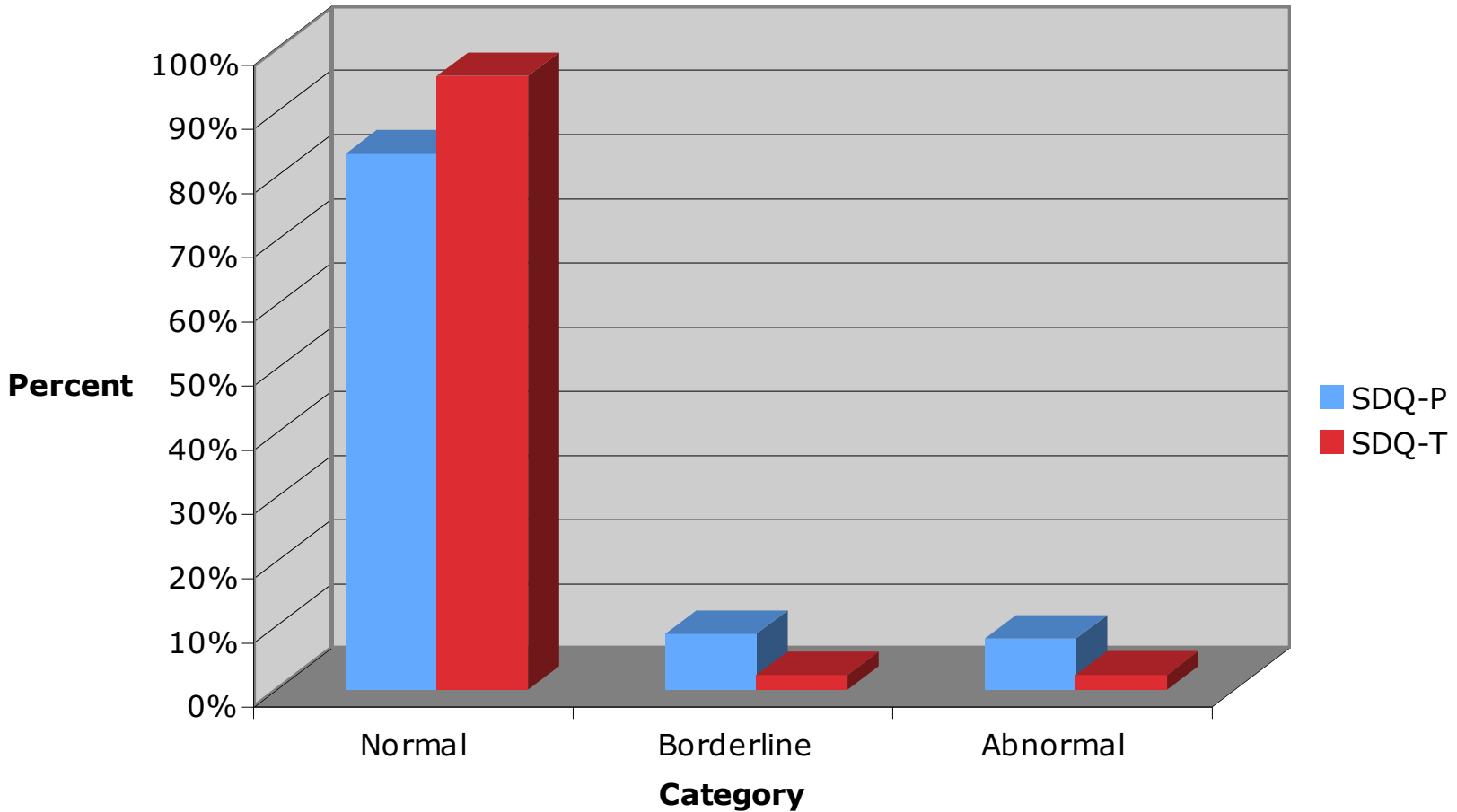
Emotional Concern:



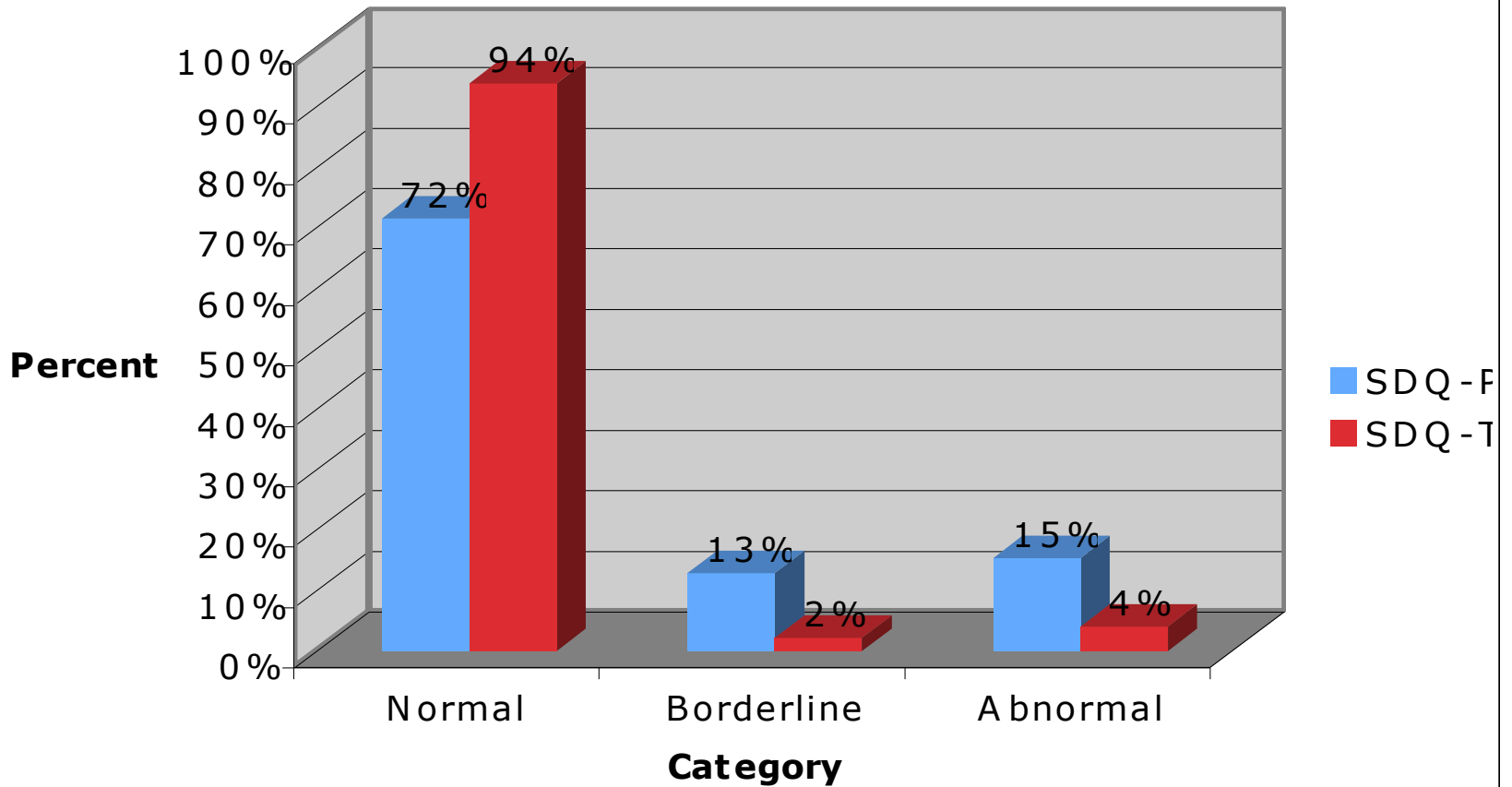
Hyperactivity scores



Peer problem scores



Conduct problem:



Planned or under-way

- Factor analysis
 - Determining whether the questions in the SDQ relate appropriately to the domains
- Validity of SDQ check in a NZ context
- Translation of SDQ into a range of New Zealand languages

Summary

- The SDQ is well accepted by most parents, but less well by ECE teachers
- It appears to identify children with behavioural and mental health difficulties at similar rates to other countries
- There are gender and ethnicity differences

Summary

- The SDQ identifies 2-3% of children with borderline or abnormal scores
- Subscale scores are highest for conduct problems - 13% borderline and 15% abnormal
- Parents appear better at identifying these difficulties than preschool teachers