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Learning Disabilities and Behaviour Disorder – An Overview of Research

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the research that centers on the learning difficulties among behavior disorder children. The research studies have been analysed to note whether behavior disorder children experience learning disabilities. Number of research quoted in this article highlight externalizing behavior disorder and internalizing behavior disorder of children with learning disabilities. The studies reviewed in this paper form a base to conclude that behavior disorder children experience learning disabilities to greater extent and hence this paper concludes that while planning intervention programme for children with behavior disorder one has to take care for their learning disabilities also. This article will be an eye opener for the professionals to develop effective educational programme which incorporate strategies for learning disabilities and for the behavior disorder intervention.

KEYWORDS: Behavior disorder, Learning Disabilities, Externalizing Behavior disorder

Introduction

Children and adolescents with Learning Disabilities face a variety of challenges in their lives, and may be at risk for emotional and behavioral problems. In some cases, behavioral or emotional problems may be triggered by the stress of difficulties in school, or they may be a contributing factor for poor achievement in school or to learning difficulties (Rutter & Yule, 1970). Many studies also have had relatively small sample size or a preponderance of males, have not matched youth with and without reading problems in terms of other relevant characteristics such as socio demographic factors, or have not considered the presence of co morbid ADHD contributing to emotional and behavioral problems. Behaviour problems in children and adolescents can be classified into two major domains of dysfunction, namely externalizing behaviours and internalizing behaviours (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1978). The externalizing behaviours are marked by defiance, impulsivity, hyperactivity, aggression and antisocial features. The internalizing behaviours are evidenced by withdrawal, dysphoria and anxiety.

Significant associations have been obtained consistently between learning disabilities and behaviour problems and various studies have supported this view. (Rutter et al, 1970; Rutter and Yule (1970); Berger et al (1975) ; Lewis et al, (1980); Scott 1981;Silver (1981); Sturge 1982; McGee et al (1986); Larson (1988); Mc Kinney 1989; Ritter 1989; Cantwell & Baker 1991; Fergusson & Horwood 1992 ; Faraone et al 1993; Vaughn et al 1993; Lyon 1996; Sanson et al 1996; Blumsack et al 1997; Prior et al, 1999; Spagna et al 2000; Tomblin et al 2000). Results of surveys have shown that between 24% and 54% of learning disabled children have behaviour problems (Mc Michael 1979; Mc Gee et al 1984; Schachter et al 1991). Khurana (1980) in a study conducted at Baroda, India; on 100 learning disabled children, reported behaviour problems in 84% cases. Jorm et al (1986) studied a sample of 453 Australian children followed over the first three years of schooling. It was found that at school entry, backward readers were having more behaviour problems. Ritter (1989) estimated the problem of behaviours of 51 adolescent girls with learning disability, using Child behaviour checklist and identified elevated problem behaviours in learning disabled group compared to adolescents without learning disability. Beitchman & Young (1997) described co morbidity of learning disorders with externalizing and internalizing behavior disorders. Spreen (1989), Haager and Vaughn (1995), Vallance et al (1998), and Grigorenko (2001) have also reported that both externalizing and internalizing behaviour problems are associated with learning disabilities.

Behavioral problems are commonly thought to be more prevalent among children and adolescents with LD, as well as among those with other types of learning disorders and language problems. Persistence of such problems was reflected in higher rates of antisocial personality disorder diagnoses at age 19 among males with language impairments relative to males with no speech or language impairment (Beitchman et al., 2001). Heiervang, Stevenson, Lund, and Hugdahl (2001) found that children with LD similarly had more parent and teacher-reported but not self-reported delinquent and aggressive behaviors than children without LD; in addition, boys but not girls with LD problems were found to have more teacher-reported externalizing behaviors than youth without LD problems.

Internalizing Behaviour Disorder

In contrast to the voluminous literature on the relation between externalizing behaviour problems and learning disabilities, little has been written about learning disabilities and internalizing problems. Myklebust (1975) reported that children with dyscalculia had social withdrawal. McGee et al (1988) noted that children with reading disability showed anxious-withdrawn behaviour. Stein and Hoover (1989) compared manifest anxiety in children with LD and without LD. They concluded that compared with non LD children, children with LD had higher total anxiety scores. Levine et al (1992) from the University of North Carolina in the study on mathematics disability, pointed out that demands of the mathematics curriculum impose increasing strains on a developing and differentiating nervous system and children with mathematics disabilities often experience profound feelings of intellectual inadequacy and sadness. This in turn can erode both self esteem and academic motivation. Such a child is likely to be exquisitely sensitive and even embarrassed when a parent tries to help him or her with home work. Huntington and Bender (1993) concluded that adolescents with learning disabilities experience higher levels of trait anxiety and have higher prevalence of somatic complaints, as well as reduced self esteem. Nabuzoka and Smith (1993) from United Kingdom found that the learning disabled children were shyer, seeking help and were often victims of bullying. McBride and Siegel (1997) of University of Columbia in a study on adolescent suicide reported that 89% of the 27 adolescents who committed suicide had significant deficits in spelling and handwriting. The study by Prior et al (1999) highlighted the risk for internalizing problems including anxiety, depression and phobias in preadolescent children with mathematics difficulties.

Conclusion

This article overviewed the researches carried out on Behaviour Disorder and Learning Disability. There is evidence that behaviour disordered children experience learning problems and on the other hand children with learning disabilities exhibit externalizing and internalizing behaviour disorder. When a professional is handling children with learning disabilities they should not only concentrate only on their learning disability intervention programmes. They should also plan for behavioural therapy which helps the child to cope up with their behavioural problems. This article will be a lime light to stress the need to have a wholistic intervention programme where we have to incorporate cognitive and behavioural aspects in the education of Children with learning disabilities. Such comprehensive strategies can alone help the children to overcome their learning disabilities and behavior disorders too.

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