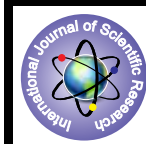


A Study of Behavior Problems in Primary School Children, in A Rural Setting, in India



Medical Science

KEYWORDS : Behavior problems, Primary school children, Class teachers as raters

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ABSTRACT

Behavioral and emotional disorders in children include internalizing symptoms which affect the self and externalizing symptoms that impact others and the environment.

The objectives of this study were to study the prevalence of behavior problems among primary school children in a rural area and to study the association between scholastic performance and behavior problems.

In this cross-sectional study, 198 children, 114 boys and 84 girls between 6 and 12 years of age, were rated on Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL 6-18years) - Teacher Rating Form (TRF), revised 2001, by his/her class teacher.

The prevalence rate for behavior/emotional problems was found to be 63.7% as per Achenbach's cutoff scores. It was also seen that children who had lesser behavior problems are able to do well academically. School teachers can serve as valuable resources both for identifying behavior problems early and providing appropriate support to the child and his/her family as part of multidisciplinary mental health services providing team.

INTRODUCTION

Behavioral and emotional disorders occur frequently in the general population of children. They include internalizing symptoms which affect the self and bring about subjective distress or psychological pain and externalizing symptoms that impact others and the environment due to acting out behavior. Internalizing symptoms include depression, anxiety, obsessive, compulsive, psychotic and schizoid symptoms while externalizing symptoms include hyperactive and impulsive behaviors, aggressive and violent behaviors, features of mania and hypomania, oppositional behaviors and substance abuse.

Psychiatric epidemiological studies from developed countries indicate that more than a quarter of children and adolescents meet lifetime criteria for a mental disorder [1]. Community studies on emotional/behavioral disorders in children and adolescents conducted in India have yielded disparate point prevalence estimates (2.6%-35.6%) [2-4]. The variation in the estimates may be due to differences in the diagnostic criteria, sampling methods, instruments and informants chosen across the studies.

Children under 16 years of age constitute over 40% of India's population and estimating the prevalence of psychiatric problems in children and adolescents and also identifying them early is of importance in planning and providing appropriate mental health services to this vulnerable population [5].

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the prevalence of behavior problems among primary school children in a rural area.
2. To study the association between scholastic performance and behavior problems.

METHODOLOGY

This was a cross-sectional study conducted in three primary schools run by the government in a village located in Dharmapuri district of the state of Tamilnadu.

Children between 6 and 12 years of age, belonging to both the sexes were included as subjects. Known cases of moderate-severe mental retardation, head-injury or post encephalitic sequelae were excluded.

Each subject was rated on Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL 6-18years)-Teacher Rating Form (TRF), revised 2001, by his/her class teacher. The CBCL covers a broad range of symptoms and several positive attributes related to academic and social competence. The checklist presents items related to mood, frustration tolerance, hyperactivity, oppositional behavior and

others. The teacher version has 113 items to be rated 0(not true), 1(sometimes true) or 2(very true).

Informed consent was taken from the heads of the three primary schools involved in the study and the teachers. The data thus collected was analyzed using relevant statistical methods.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

198 primary school children were included in the study. All the children came from families where the parents were working as agricultural laborers or in the construction industry as laborers.

None of the children had any illness or disability (either physical or mental). Out of the 198 children included in the study 114 were boys while 84 were girls (Table 1).

The mean age of the primary school children was 8.29 years (Table 2). The cut off scores for CBCL as given by Achenbach are in Table 3. Based on these cut off scores, out of the 198 children included in the study, 126 (63.7%) were found to have behavior problems (Table 4). The mean CBCL scores were 50.54 (Table 5).

Pearson's correlation was used to study the association between academic performance and behavior problems. This study showed a negative significant correlation between the two variables (Table 6).

GENDER

| Sample | Boys | Girls |
|--------|------|-------|
| N=198 | 114 | 84 |

Table 1

AGE OF THE SUBJECTS

| Sample | Range | Mean | SD |
|--------|---------|------|-------|
| N=198 | 7-12yrs | 8.29 | 1.137 |

Table 2

CUT-OFF SCORES BY ACHENBACH

| Age | Girls | Boys |
|----------|-------|------|
| 4-5yrs | 42 | 42 |
| 6-11yrs | 37 | 40 |
| 12-16yrs | 37 | 38 |

Table 3

PREVALENCE OF BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

| Behavior problems | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Total | 198 | 100% |
| Yes | 126 | 63.7% |
| No | 72 | 36.3% |

Table 4

MEAN CBCL SCORES OF THE SUBJECTS

| Sample | Mean | SD |
|--------|-------|--------|
| N=198 | 50.54 | 19.403 |

Table 5

CORRELATION BETWEEN SCHOLASTIC PERFORMANCE AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

| Correlations | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| | | Sub Tot | Q Tot |
| Scholastic performance | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -.456** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 198 | 198 |
| Behavior problems | Pearson Correlation | -.456** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 198 | 198 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6

DISCUSSION

In this study the prevalence rate for behavior/emotional problems was found to be 63.7%. Community studies done in India on behavioral disorders in children and adolescents showed the prevalence figures varying from 2.6% to 35.6%. A child generally spends around 6-7hrs of his/her waking time in school and hence class teachers would be able to provide more details regarding a child's behavior. The mean CBCL score in this study was 50.54 with a SD of 19.403.

On studying the association between scholastic performance and behavior problems, it was seen that children who had lesser behavior problems are able to do well academically. This further emphasizes the need to recognize the behavior issues early and help the child appropriately enlisting the help of both the parents and the teachers to help them become successful and content citizens of tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

India being a developing country with a large population, a significant proportion of which are school aged children. Behavior/emotional problems in these children are a matter of concern as the outcomes can seriously impact their ability to become useful citizens of tomorrow. Hence early identification and appropriate interventions would go a long way in helping these children lead fruitful lives.

Regarding management in child psychiatry, emphasis is on changing the attitudes of parents, reassuring and retraining children, working with the family and coordinating the efforts of others who can help these children especially at school. In this aspect school teachers can serve as valuable resources both for identifying behavior problems early and providing appropriate support to the child and his/her family as part of multidisciplinary mental health services providing team.

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