

Understanding behavioral problems and parental stress in children with Cerebral Palsy

childhood
disability
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Summary

The goal of this study was to better understand behavioral problems in children with cerebral palsy. It aimed to understand what problematic behaviors are most common and what factors might make behavioral problems better or worse. The study found that children with cerebral palsy have significantly higher rates of behavior problems when compared with other children their age. They struggle most with peer, emotional, and hyperactivity issues.

This study did not find any relationship between a child's IQ, physical limitations (such as being in a wheel chair) or family income, and increased behavior problems. They did find a relationship between behavioral problems and elevated stress levels in parents. They also found that those children whose IQ was lower than 70 and those who had severe physical limitations (such as being confined to a wheelchair) had the least developed social skills.

About this study

This study focused on children between the ages of 6 and 12 years with cerebral palsy. The researchers used several tests and questionnaires to gain information about the children's IQ, motor function, their behavioral strengths and difficulties, and how well they were able to participate in everyday social interactions. The parents of these children filled out questionnaires about their socio-economic status (including parental education, income, and marriage status), the resources that they used and that were available to them and their children, and their children's medical history. Parents also filled out a survey that evaluated their stress levels. Researchers used statistical analysis to examine whether there was a significant relationship tying together aspects of the children's medical histories, their physical and intellectual limitations, or their socio-economic status with behavior problems.

What families should know

- Behavioral problems are more common in children with cerebral palsy.
- These behavioral problems tend to lead to increased stress levels for parents, so parents need to actively seek out resources for themselves to aid in dealing with this added stress.
- Children who have lower IQs or severe physical limitations tend to struggle with social integration and might benefit from participating in programs that encourage the development of social skills

What practitioners should know

- Behavioral problems are more common in children with cerebral palsy but are rarely addressed in the clinical setting.
- Children with cerebral palsy may need additional resources that address their behavior and ability to integrate socially such as hyperactivity medication, individual or group therapy, or behavior counseling.
- Parents of children with cerebral palsy who have behavioral problems tend to have higher stress levels and may need to be directed or referred to sources of support or counseling.

Reference

Marie Brossard-Racine, Nick Hall, Annette Majnemer, Michael I. Shevell, Mary Law, Chantal Poulin, Peter Rosenbaum, Behavioural problems in school age children with cerebral palsy, *European Journal of Paediatric Neurology*, Volume 16, Issue 1, January 2012, Pages 35-41

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