Language development in children with attention deficit disorder

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Abstract:
Children with an attention deficit disorder (ADHD) exhibit a number of behavioural characteristics which include hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattentiveness. They may experience difficulties in cognitive, academic, and social tasks which, in turn, may lead to rejection, perceived failure, and emotional upset. No clear etiology has been confirmed, with current research focusing on the role of genetics, environmental toxins, neurological factors, and parenting style. Common therapeutic interventions include medication regimes, social skills training, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and parental training in behaviour modification. Yet, reviews of these techniques suggest disappointing findings, with positive results being attributed to the prolonged monitoring of behaviours by parents/school staff rather than increased ability of a child to self-regulate and self-control. The present study examined receptive, expressive, and pragmatic language abilities in 37 children, ages 6–10, diagnosed with an attention deficit disorder. A number of neuropsychological tests (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - III; Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals - 3; Test of Language Development - Primary and Intermediate; Test of Pragmatic Language; NEPSY Auditory Attention and Response Test) and questionnaires (Child Behaviour Checklist; Social Skills Rating System) were used to investigate the relationship between language functioning and social skills competency. Analyses revealed no deficits on measures of receptive language and no gender differences (25 boys, 12 girls). However, significant differences were shown on expressive language tasks. The sample performed below the average range, with the older group of children (ages 9–10) having significant difficulties compared with the younger group of participants (ages 6–8). These deficits in language ability were related to issues in social competency including the presence of Internalizing and Externalizing behaviours. The results support research that suggests this disorder is not exclusively a deficit of attention.

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