



Behavioural Issues Across Different Disabilities

Gdr. Amit Sen, MD (NIMHANS) MRCPsych (UK) CCST (UK), Senior Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science & Research

Behavioural difficulties or deviances are common across all disabilities. The behaviours may be etiologically associated with the disability or may develop as a consequence of the disability. Often it is a combination of the two.

Behavioural phenotypes consist of distinctive behaviours that typify certain genetic or chromosomal disorders. For example, the severe form of self mutilating behaviour found in all cases of Lesch Nyhan syndrome. Behaviour that exhibits such a strong association with the core syndrome are clearly due to the direct result of the biology of the condition.

Certain other behaviour patterns appear to have close neuropsychological links but are likely to be the result of complex interactions between neurological substrates and environmental influences. Such as the deficient or deviant social behaviour in the autistic spectrum disorder which forms the core of the neurodevelopmental syndrome but could also be deeply influenced by the impact of poor language and communication skills on their immediate environment.

On the other end of the spectrum are behaviours that emerge later and clearly as a consequence of an existing disability. Adolescent antisocial behaviours in learning disabled children are a good example.

Most children with a combination of developmental and behavioural problems, however, fall in the middle of the spectrum, where the cause and effect relationship is hard to establish. For example, impulsive and inattentive behaviours are defining features in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and associated features of Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and/or Conduct Disorder (CD), problems in learning and achievement, and peer rejection. The high incidence of learning disabilities (global and specific) in the group of behaviour disorders (ADHD, CD/ODD) is now firmly established.

The high occurrence of behaviour disorders/problems in mental retardation, specific learning disabilities and specific sensory (hearing/vision) impairment is also noteworthy.

Behavioural issues and various disabilities appear to be inextricably linked. Insights into the complex associations and interactions between the two become essential to understand, manage, ameliorate and/or prevent some of these complications.