An Objective Evaluation of Special Class Placement of Elementary Schoolboys with Behavior Problems

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Behavioral checklists were employed to identify the type and degree of psychopathology observed in 90 boys who were referred for possible placement in classrooms for the socially and emotionally disturbed (SED). School behavior was assessed by teachers completing the Conners Teacher Rating Scale, while behavior at home was rated by parents with the Child Behavior Checklist. The checklist findings from both environments showed the boys to have high levels of psychological disturbance, especially for externalizing factors such as hyperactivity, aggression, and conduct disorder. This was especially true for those boys for whom SED placement was recommended. Further, the clinical usefulness of these checklists was investigated as an adjunctive method for the determination of the need for SED placement. By the use of discriminant function analysis, about three-fourths of the boys recommended for SED placement were accurately identified; correct classification was maximized when parent and teacher checklists were employed together.

When behavioral checklists completed by teachers have been used to study groups that have been identified as having classroom behavioral problems, the findings have consistently indicated that these deviant groups of children have more psychopathology than children with learning disabilities or without...
identified behavior problems. Further, the psychopathology observed in the school environment has been characterized as primarily misconduct and/or aggression (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1978; MacMillan & Morrison, 1979; Quay, 1979).

However, these studies have not provided substantial knowledge of the true degree of the severity of this psychopathology in that they did not use standard scores based on normative data (e.g., $T$ scores) for comparison purposes. Similarly, $T$ scores of parent checklist ratings have also not been employed to describe simultaneously the severity and pervasiveness of the disorders in the home environment. Previous teacher-parent checklist studies also have focused primarily on normal children, samples of children with “classroom behavior problems,” or specific behavior disorder groups such as hyperactivity (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1978; Glow, Glow, & Rump, 1982; Quay, 1979; Zentall, 1984). Such reports have not concentrated on complete populations of children referred for possible special class placement because of their serious classroom behavior difficulties.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate objectively a total population of elementary schoolboys who were referred for possible placement in classrooms for the socially and emotionally disturbed (SED). We used behavior checklists to identify problems in both their school and home environments. Teachers and parents independently completed the Conners Teacher Rating Scale (CTRS, Conners, 1973) and the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL, Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983), respectively. The severity of their difficulties was determined with $T$ scores from both instruments, while the types of psychopathology were identified by the factor patterns of the checklists. We further examined the clinical usefulness of the teacher and parent checklists, employed separately and together, in the correct classification of those boys for whom SED placement was recommended.

**METHOD**

*Subjects*

The study included 90 elementary schoolboys, aged 6–12 years, from a semirural three-county area of central Pennsylvania. The subjects were all boys in this age group who were consecutively referred over a period of 2 school years for potential socially or emotionally disturbed (SED) class placement. Two boys required psychiatric hospitalization and were not included as subjects, and the small number of referred girls ($N = 9$) were also not analyzed. SED classrooms are for children with average intelligence who have significant behavior or emotional problems that cannot be managed in a