ADHD-Related Behavior Among Non-Referred Children: Parents' Ratings of DSM-III-R Symptoms

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ABSTRACT: To identify the prevalence of ADHD symptoms among non-referred children, parents' ratings based on DSM-III-R criteria for ADHD were obtained for 1022 metropolitan children of ages 4 to 12. The prevalence rates of fourteen behavior items were markedly lower for boys of ages 10-12 than of ages 7-9, and for girls of ages 7-9 than of ages 4-6. 41.5% of the 7.7% subjects meeting ADHD criteria had been identified by their teachers as having problems symptomatic of ADHD, and one third had been reported by their parents as having conduct problems and emotional difficulties. A factor analysis revealed three factors: inattention; hyperactivity; and excessive verbal activities.

KEY WORDS: Parents' ratings; diagnosis; prevalence; attention deficit disorder.

Behavior that fits the diagnostic criteria for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is often present in non-referred children. The criteria for DSM-III-R are met only when such behavior is considerably more frequent than that of most people of the same mental age. However, objective criteria for the same age group have not been established regarding frequency and intensity of the behavior. Moreover, individuals differ in their assessment of such behavior.
Some take a permissive attitude toward some of the behavior, regarding it as childlike, active, and desirable. This includes children's behavior such as having difficulty remaining seated, blurting out the answer before the question is completed, and excessive talking. Other persons seek to control such behavior, regarding it as bad and bothersome to others. Socio-cultural differences are also seen in the evaluation of such behavior.¹

The diagnostic criteria for DSM-III-R are widely accepted for both clinical research and diagnosis in Japan. However, no study has reported the prevalence of the symptoms of such behavior in non-referred Japanese children. The purpose of this investigation was to identify the following three points based on ratings made by parents:

1. to identify the prevalence of ADHD symptoms among non-referred children; and
2. to determine any variation in prevalence according to age or gender;
3. the study will also give some consideration to the question of whether a unidimensional approach should be taken to ADHD based on the data.

Method

Sample and Procedure

This report is based on two surveys. Survey One covered a sample of children enrolled in grades one to four in elementary schools in Ichikawa City, a city within the metropolitan Tokyo region. Four differing districts of Ichikawa City were selected. One district was commercial; one was an old, established residential district; one was a new residential district; and one was formerly agricultural. A sample was taken of children in the appropriate age groups in each of the four districts according to residential records kept in the ward office. Originally, the authors mailed the questionnaire, intending to visit to collect them after completion. However, the parents proved to be absent beyond expectations at the time of the visit. After missing two visits for collection, the parents were asked to return the questionnaire by mail. Survey One was carried out in August and September of 1991.

The age range covered in Survey Two was broadened by two years in either direction to cover a broader age range than that of Survey One. Survey Two thus had two additional groups of subjects: preschool children of ages four and five, and children in fifth and sixth grades. Children in these age groups were sampled as in Survey One. Survey Two was conducted by mail in July and August of 1992.

The two surveys collected a total of 1,022 eligible responses. A breakdown