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Relationships Between Problem Behaviors and Academic Achievement in Adolescents: The Unique Role of Attention Problem

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Barriga, Q.A., Doran, J.W., Newll, S.B., Morrison, E.M, Barbetti, V., & Robbins, B.D. (2002). Relationships Between Problem Behaviors and Academic Achievement in Adolescents: The Unique Role of Attention Problem. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 10(4), 233-240.

Abstract : **Objective**

This American study focused on the correlation between behavioural problems and academic performance. The authors set forth a hypothesis to the effect that the link between behavioural problems and low academic performance is influenced by the effect of an attention disorder. Therefore, the main objective was to determine whether or not the effect of an attention deficit mitigated the correlation between the different types of behavioural problems and academic performance.

Methodology

The sample consisted of 41 male and 17 female students between the ages of 11 and 19 years and attending an alternative school located in an American north-eastern urban area. Participants were mainly white (55%) or African-American (45%).

The tools used to assess the study variables were the Teacher Report Form (TRF), which enabled to measure teachers' perception regarding students' academic functioning and behavioural problems such as withdrawal, somatic complaints, anxiety/depression, social problems, thought problems, attention problems, delinquent behaviour, aggressive behaviour, and the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT3), which was used to measure participants' performance in reading, writing and arithmetic. The experiment was conducted within the school context. Once they had obtained parental and student consent, the researchers administered the WRAT3 to the students individually under the supervision of personnel trained to this effect. A week later, during their recess periods, teachers completed the TRF.

Main Results

Results have indicated that certain externalized behavioural problems such as aggressive and delinquent behaviour, and internalized behavioural problems such as withdrawal and somatic complaints were associated with low academic performance, but others were not or were associated with it to a lesser extent (anxiety/depression, social problem and thought problem).

As for their initial hypothesis, the authors conclude that the effect of attention deficit disorder among behavioural problems did influence the correlation between the latter and academic performance. Consequently, several externalized and internalized behavioural problems did not seem to be directly associated with low academic performance, but were rather associated with an attention disorder which appeared to be the element with the highest effect on academic performance.

The study has also revealed that the "attention deficit" component of the disorder rather than its "hyperactivity/impulsiveness" component had a higher bearing on low academic performance.

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Key Words :

Behavioural Disorders, Externalized Behaviour, Internalized Behaviour, Attention Disorder, Academic Performance, Alternative School, Adolescence, Quantitative Analysis, Secondary/High School

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