



Disorganised Children: the Educational Cost of Unidentified Neuro-Developmental Difficulties in Children and Adolescents

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Abstract

“Disorganised children” suffer from a wide array of neuro-developmental processing problems that actively impede their emotional, social and academic progress. Unfortunately, rather than being recognised effectively and early as having neurologically-based deficits, they are most often referred to child and adolescent mental health services due to concerns about emotional and behavioural problems, which occur both at home and at school. By this time, their presentation has often been attributed to underlying emotional problems, family difficulties, defiance, disobedience, oppositional attitudes, difficulties with authority and naughtiness.

Whilst these “disorganised children” present with elements of ADHD, Autism, Tourette Syndrome, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia, they often fail to meet the diagnostic criteria for any one particular diagnosis. However, their presentation is extremely consistent with a probable, but subtle, neuro-biological deficit which is of sufficient severity to cause demonstrable difficulties, both within the family and within the classroom. If these “disorganized children” can be identified early, and receive appropriate therapeutic help, they are more likely to remain in school rather than being excluded and becoming educationally marginalised. They would also be more likely to engage socially, and avoid alternative sub-cultures and substance misuse.

The aim of this presentation is to highlight the needs of this very interesting, and yet often overlooked, group of children before they are negatively and unhelpfully labelled as being badly behaved, with an emphasis on punishment rather than on support. It will be aimed at all educationalists who may come into contact with these children and adolescents, as well as addressing mental health and social issues. Unfortunately, if not identified and treated when still young enough to change, the educational costs of this missed diagnosis are potentially extreme, and their adult outcome is likely to be significantly worse.