

Academic Underachievement in a Group of Egyptian School Students: Possible Etiological Factors

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Abstract

There has been considerable interest in the study of disordered learning and consequently the problem of academic underachievement. This problem has been long viewed as a complex maladaptation involving a number of interacting variables which are the biological, psychological & sociocultural factors. This study was done to assess the relative importance of these variables as possible etiological factors that may underlie the problem of academic underachievement. 86 students with delayed academic achievement constituted the cases and 28 students with good academic achievement constituted the control group. Clinical and psychosocial assessment was done and comparisons between both groups were performed. The results indicated that the significant factors underlying academic underachievement were: factors detected from the history: e.g., antenatal medical problems or drug intake, neonatal morbidity, preterm labour and delayed milestones of growth, and epilepsy, low social class, low IQ, and severe social stressors. On top of the list, were social stressors followed by history suggestive of biological insult, educational status of mother and father, then anxiety and low IQ.

Introduction

In our country, among a population of 60 million, children between 5-16 years old constitute 24.7% of the total population (Okasha, 1996). Thus, if the children of school age constitute a quarter of the whole number of the Egyptian population, they represent a great bulk of the nation's potential resources for present and future. Learning is considered the primary activity of childhood, and represents the central developmental task for school-age children. The mastery of academic tasks is probably the best indicator of child current functioning and is essential to the development of self-esteem and psychological well being (Young et al, 1995). Therefore, there has been considerable interest in the study of disordered learning. This issue was also emphasized by the writings of Sikorski (1996), who reported that the spectrum of behaviors from subtle academic underachievement to school refusal and drop-out are considered serious health risks in children and adolescence, with high risk for adverse consequences and comorbidities in later life development. Thus, academic underachievement is considered a part of a spectrum of risk behaviors that include psychosocial as well as psychiatric consequences, and has become a grave concern not only to contemporary (developed) nations, but also to all nations challenged by the optimal development

of the human potential and threatened by the waste of human resources (Sikorski, 1996). Successful adaptation as reported by Walzer & Richmond (1973), is possible only when some degree of homeostasis exists among the biological, psychosocial and sociocultural factors. According to this model, learning disorder is viewed as a complex maladaptation involving a number of interacting variables which are the biological, psychological & sociocultural.

Subjects and Methods

Subjects:

Students under study were randomly selected from primary and preparatory schools from rural and urban areas in Dakahlia Governorate. 86 students with delayed academic achievement constituted the cases and 28 students with good academic achievement constituted the control group. Delayed academic achievement was considered according to:

1. The Comments of parents, teachers, school psychologists and/or sociologists.
2. Examination Records:
 - ** Students who failed in one or multiple subjects or who got 50% or less in the mid year or last year examination for more than one year.
 - ** Children in the second and third primary school