

Developmental Disorder and Abuses

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1. Suspect developmental disorders, and suspect abuses

Schools are facing rapidly increasing behavioral problems of children, who leave their seats and disturb other children during lessons, or who lose their temper and commit violence on teachers and classmates over seemingly trivial things, when they cannot have their own way. Possible factors behind such behaviors include the developmental disorders that those children might have, like attention deficit and hyperactivity (ADHD) syndrome and autistic disability, as well as abuses at home. Developmental disorders, mild disabilities in particular, and child abuses have reportedly increased sharply over the past few years, and have captured societal attention. There has been, however, limited research on the relationship between developmental disorders and child abuses, and thus, there exist lots of unanswered questions. This paper focuses mainly upon the following two issues: 1) Children with developmental disorders are more susceptible to abuses by custodians including parents. 2) Children, when subjected to abuses by custodians, come to show symptoms similar to developmental disorders.

2. Child abuses have multiplied in recent years

The number of child abuse cases that the Child Guidance Centers have handled over the past several years has increased sharply, as shown by Fig. 1. For fourteen years between 1990, when the Child Guidance Centers all across the nation began collecting data about the problem, and 2004, the number of cases has risen nearly thirty-fold, from 1,101 to 32,979.

3. Children with developmental disorders are more susceptible to abuses.

The survey that Hosokawa et al undertook as part of health and welfare science research in 2001 shows that abused children had disabilities in 1008 cases among the total child abuse cases of 13,983 that were handled by the Child Guidance Centers across the nation, representing 7.2 % (588 boys and 420 girls). The research indicates that children with disabilities are four to ten times more susceptible to abuses than non-disabled kids. Our research on child abuses demonstrates, as shown by Table 1, that a high proportion of abused children have behavioral and emotional problems, or

show signs of retarded mental development.

4. Does the child abuse cause developmental disorders ?

It is believed that minor cerebral lesion and heredity causes the functional disorder of the brain, which in turn leads to developmental disorders. When we carefully review the circumstances under which children diagnosed to have pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) have been brought up, we sometimes do not know for sure if the problem is pervasive developmental disorders or reactive attachment disorders (RAD), as those children usually have trouble in terms of attachment to their parents. On the clinical front, we often come across the cases in which behaviors of children from normal families, yet with insufficient parental affection are classified as RAD.

It is believed that child abuses as well as biological factors in some cases contribute to ADHD, and that they have enormous impacts on the prognosis of the symptoms. It is said that people with ADHD, depending on their ages, either develop externalized disorders, such as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder (CD), antisocial personality disorder (ASP), and alcohol/drug abuse, or internalized ones, like anxiety disorder, mood disorder, ODD, withdrawal into homes with anxiety and depressive disorder, and ensuing personality disorder, where aggressiveness of ADHD becomes more internal and antisocial. Their symptoms can change due to upbringing, abuse, bullying and corporal punishment that people have suffered in school lives.

5. Providing support to children with developmental disorders and their custodians

Before providing support to parents (or custodians) who have disabled children to take care of, you must have a very good understanding of how parents, mothers in particular, feel. Those parents are often criticized by others, including their parents (children's grandparents), husband, teachers of schools, kindergartens and day-care centers, and have low self-esteem in terms of their ability to raise and educate their own children. Then, you have to encourage them to understand the developmental disorders of their children, to explain the prospects of their children's future, how children should be raised at home, share with them necessary skills to raise them, and to suggest to them that their children should be educated and cared at appropriate care institutions as early as possible commensurate with the severity of disabilities. These measures will make them more confident and motivated to nurture their youngsters. You have to keep in mind, however, that parents have greater trouble understanding of their children's disabilities if they are less severe. Specific support to children with developmental disorders and to their families includes:

- 1) provide regular medical checkups at healthcare institutions, and appropriate and specific advice concerning daily lives, as well as drug treatment
- 2) clinical psychologist providing counseling to children and their parents, and offering play therapy
- 3) help develop children through speech and occupational therapies
- 4) introduce local kindergartens and day-care centers that accept and care disabled children
- 5) talk with relevant institutions concerning teaching staff of kindergartens, day-care centers and schools that the child attends, and the daily life at those educational institutions
- 6) community nurses, family counselors and chief child welfare officers visiting the family for counseling
- 7) encourage them to have certificates of physical and mental disabilities issued for public assistance to cover healthcare and other costs
- 8) encourage them to use disability allowance to access to institutions for disabled adults and children and to short stay and day service run by NPOs
- 9) introduce them to parents' associations and local organizations of children with same disabilities
- 10) Parents having trouble to care their children at home are encouraged to put youngsters in, depending upon the severity of disabilities, children's homes, short-stay institutions for emotionally disturbed children, institutions for intellectual disabilities, or institutions for the independent living of children. When disabled children who have been abused are institutionalized, they might have trouble getting along with other residents, or relive abusive inter-personal relationship. Staff members at such institutions are required to provide care more responsive to emotional aspects of such children.

Table 1 Situations of abused children

	Children with behavioral or emotional problems (%)	Children with intellectual development retardation (%)
Survey covering day-care centers for children in four prefectures in 1997-1998	57.9	21.0
Tochigi Prefecture`s survey on abused young children in 1999	27.7	11.6

Fig 1 The number of child abuse cases handled by Child Guidance Centers across the nation

