

Abstract

The present study bases on the secondary data collected by the Luk's research team in 1993. This was a 7-years follow-up study to examine whether clinical diagnosis of behavior disorder in preschool-age children can predict for behavior disturbances in late childhood. 221 children aged 3 years were selected from the epidemiological study of behavior disorder in preschool children in Hong Kong, and 136 children completed the follow-up.

71.4% (10 out of 14) children who had received the diagnosis at age 3 were still cases at age 10. Children with diagnosable behavior problem were 6 times more likely to have persistent problems than normal children or children with less severe behavior problems. Except for child's non-verbal intelligence other known risk factors of child psychopathology included single-parent family, SES, marital discord, and parental psychopathology were not associated to age-3 clinical diagnosis. Boys were more vulnerable for persistent problem and later emergence of behavior problems. Half of the children in the problem persistence group had similar nature of problem at follow-up. Clinical diagnosis by clinician was more sensitive than screening instruments in identifying behavior problems in preschool children.

High predictability of severe behavior problem across time indicating higher sensitive is required for mental health professionals to identify children at early risk of behavior disorder. The results indicate that it is meaningful to make diagnosis for children showing severe behavior problems at 3 years old.