

I) Abstract

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a well known childhood disorder to pose difficulties in parenting. However there has been little research into mental health of the parents of children with ADHD. Parents of these children have a higher risk of suffering from psychiatric disorders particularly ADHD, depression and anxiety disorders. Not only the stress of having to parent a hyperactive child but also complex genetic associations between ADHD, mood and anxiety disorders renders these parents vulnerable to above mentioned psychiatric disorders.

The genetic complexity of ADHD is now increasingly being revealed. High proportion of parents of children with ADHD had suffered from the disorder themselves in their childhood. Persistence of this disorder into adulthood in a significant proportion of childhood sufferers is a relatively new but well recognized concept. Because of this high genetic predisposition it can be assumed that adult ADHD is commoner in parents with children with ADHD compared to parents who don't have children affected by this disorder. However, there is paucity of information into this. There was no reported research from Asian countries.

This study attempts to determine the extent of adult attention deficit hyperactive disorder, depression and anxiety disorders among parents of children with ADHD.

The study was conducted at child guidance clinics of Colombo South Teaching Hospital and Lady Ridgeway Hospital. Biological parents of children with ADHD were assessed for adult ADHD using Wender Utah criteria. This includes assessment of childhood ADHD in the parent with Utah sub scale followed by a clinical interview to assess for persistence of the disorder

according to Wender Utah criteria. The same study population was screened for depression and anxiety disorders using Hospital Anxiety Depression rating scale.

Of the study population of 103 biological parents, majority were unemployed though most of them had studied up to O/L. 11.7% of these parents had suffered from ADHD in their childhood. A significant proportion (9.7%) of them is still suffering from ADHD.

There is a positive association between adult ADHD and lower educational achievement and in females not holding paid employment though the latter was not seen in males.

Presence of adult ADHD in the parent was not associated with higher rate of marital breakdown among these parents.

Considerable proportion of 32% and 36% of parents were suffering from depression and anxiety disorders respectively.

None of the parents had previously been detected to be suffering from adult ADHD. Only a minority of those suffering from depression and anxiety has sought medical advice.

This study illustrates that significant numbers of parents who were bringing children to the public sector clinics for treatment of ADHD are suffering from ADHD, depression and anxiety disorders themselves. In spite of the fact that parental psychopathology is important for well being of the family and the management of the child's disorder only a small number of these parents had been identified as suffering from a psychiatric disorder. Therefore the medical professionals treating children with ADHD should maintain a high degree of suspicion of presence of psychiatric morbidity in parents.