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Depression, anxiety and stress in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

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Introduction: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a condition characterized by the triad of inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity whom affect ominously academic performance, parent-child relationships and social and psychosocial adjustment. More than 50% have comorbidity with learning difficulties, mood disorder, anxiety disorder, substance abuse and alcohol and is therefore associated with a worse prognosis.

Aim: This research aims to contribute to the study of depression, anxiety and stress in children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Methods: Cross-sectional study where clinical assessment was made to a group of hyperactive children aged between 8 and 15 years, followed in Paediatric Outpatient Unit and in Child Psychiatry Service. The assessment of children included filling out demographic data and application of the Portuguese version of the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales for Children. This group was compared with a control group composed of children selected at Paediatrics consultation.

Results: Median age in clinical group was 10 years and 12 years in the control group. Depression and stress levels are higher in the clinical group. The occurrence of at least one life event in the last year obtains high scores of depression, anxiety and stress. The Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is more frequent in males. The disorder is associated with greater academic failure. Children in the clinical group have a family history of psychiatric illness.

Conclusion: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder may be due to multifactorial causes and may be associated with several aggravating factors. Depression and stress revealed higher levels in the clinical group compared to the control group. Levels of depression, anxiety and stress were higher in children who reported at least one life event in the last year. This study provides an incentive for future research and it is considered important to alert health professionals to these comorbidities associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.