Educators' experiences of managing students with ADHD: a qualitative study.

Moore DA, Russell AE, Arnell S, Ford TJ.


Abstract

BACKGROUND:
The symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder are associated with difficulty coping with the social, behavioural and academic components of school. Compared with medication and other non-pharmacological treatment, there is less evidence relating to school-based interventions to support children with ADHD. There is additionally an absence of any research focused on the experiences and practices of educators in the UK around how they work with children who are inattentive, impulsive and hyperactive.

METHODS:
Forty-two educational practitioners from primary, secondary and alternate provision schools in the UK participated in focus groups or individual interviews that explored (1) their experiences of managing students with ADHD in the classroom and (2) factors that helped and hindered them in this endeavour. Transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS:
The analysis identified six themes: broad strategies, student-centred, inclusive strategies, labelling, medication and relationships. Participants' experiences of managing students with ADHD drew upon a wide range of strategies that typically involved responding to individual needs in an inclusive manner, so individuals with ADHD could access the classroom with their peers. Participants spoke about three factors that helped and hindered managing students with ADHD. Labelling of students with ADHD was reported, with the negative aspects of labelling, such as stigmatisation, affecting the classroom. Educators reported mixed experiences regarding the helpfulness of medication; where helpful, it allowed the use of strategies in the classroom. Although students with ADHD were described as having rollercoaster relationships, positive relationships were considered key to the support of children with these difficulties.

CONCLUSIONS:
This study suggests that factors such as attitudes towards ADHD, relationships experienced by students with ADHD and other treatments being delivered need to be carefully considered before strategies are put in place in the classroom. This study supports the need for further work on the implementation of evidence-based school interventions for ADHD.