

Assessing speech, language and communication difficulties in children referred for ADHD: A qualitative evaluation of a UK child and adolescent mental health service.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common childhood neuropsychiatric disorders and is highly comorbid with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCDs). However, it is unclear how often SLCDs are identified in ADHD referrals in routine practice and whether there are unidentified SLCDs within this population.

METHOD:

A thematic analysis was conducted on a random sample of case notes from 18 referrals for ADHD made to a child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) in London, United Kingdom. Analyses aimed to identify (a) the types of SLCDs detected during assessment, (b) at which point of the episode of care these SLCDs were suspected and (c) whether a referral or consultation was made to a speech and language therapist (SLT) for further evaluation.

RESULTS:

Out of 18 cases investigated, 15 were found to have possible SLCDs based on case notes and reports provided by external agencies. However, only four were referred by CAMHS for further assessment. It is unclear what, if any, steps other external agencies took. Themes describing types of SLCDs, comorbidities and the process of identification are discussed.

CONCLUSION:

The analysis of this service's case notes revealed a range of different routes to the identification of SLCDs, and it was unclear what steps were taken as a result of assessment. A limitation is that this is just one service and the results may not generalise. However, given the similarity in practitioner training received across the country and that practitioners move from service to service, there are grounds for repeating the study in other services. We recommend a more structured approach to identifying SLCDs and recording assessment and treatment decisions made.