

Reviewed Article

Mentally Challenged Children

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Mentally challenged children refer to those children who show below average intelligence as well as difficulties in meeting the demands of everyday life whether it be in communicating and socializing with other or attending to grooming and domestic chores. It is a shocking and alarming fact that approximately 2.5 to 3% of the total population are mentally challenged which in most cases is a lifelong condition. The prevalence rate of mild mental retardation, as defined by an IQ of 50-70, was 3.71 per 1,000 populations for children. The prevalence rate of mild mental retardation in children aged 8-19 years with an IQ of 50-69 was 3.8 per 1,000. Child abuse is found in 3.6% among the mentally challenged children. The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that as many as 10-20% of all children and adolescents have some form of mental disability. The extent of the problem in our country presents a challenge to all societies throughout the nation. Mentally challenged cannot be cured. However, early detection, special education and training can help the mentally challenged to lead their lives independently to a great extent.

Keyword: Intelligence, Prevalence, Mentally challenged, Mental retardation, Special education.

Introduction

Mentally challenged is a developmental disability, which first appears in children under the age of 18. It is defined as an intellectual functioning level I.Q. below 70, that is well below average and significant limitations in daily living skills (adaptive functioning) [1].

Myths Related to Mentally Challenged

Myths or misconceptions are the wrong ideas

- Mentally challenged is a mental illness.
- Mentally challenged is not common.
- There is nothing like mentally challenged.
- Mentally challenged is always caused by hereditary factors.
- Mentally challenged can be caused by tonics and vitamins, almonds and rich nutritious food.
- Mentally challenged is due to fate.
- Mentally challenged can be fully cured.
- Mentally challenged cannot be trained or educated.
- Mentally challenged is due to small size of the brain.
- Mentally challenged is due to exposure to eclipse at the time of pregnancy or birth of the child.
- Mentally challenged can become normal in life as they grow older.
- Marriage can cure mentally challenged [2].

Classification of Mentally Challenged Children:

All mentally challenged are not alike. They are classified into four groups based on the I.Q. They are:

- **Mild (IQ 50-69)** – More than 85% of kids with the disability fall in this category and have no trouble until shortly before high school. With an IQ of around 55-70, they are sometimes unable to grasp abstract concepts but can by and large function independently. They can often acquire academic skills up to the sixth grade level. In adult life they are expected to attain the intellectual level of average 8-11 year old child.
- **Moderate (IQ 35-49)** - About 10 percent of the mentally challenged population is considered moderately challenged. They can carry out work and self-care tasks with moderate supervision. Minimal level of academic progress is possible i.e. till 3 rd grade. In adult life this group attains the intellectual level of average 4-7 year old child. They typically acquire communication skills in childhood and are able to live and function successfully within the community in a supervised environment such as a group home.
- **Severe (IQ 20-34)** - About 3 to 4 percent of the mentally challenged population is severely challenged. They may master very basic self-care skills like eating, toileting and some communication skills. They have the intellectual level of an average three years old child. They require constant care and supervision throughout their life.

- **Profound (IQ below 20)** - This is the most severe form of disability and is also the rarest, with only 1-2% of mentally challenged children constitute this group. They are severely handicapped and require extensive supervision due to poor life skills. With regular training and setting a routine, they may be able to pick up essential life functions [3].

Causes of Mental Retardation in Children

1. Causes during pregnancy

- Chromosomal disorders: - Over 30% of mental retardation is attributed to genetics.
- Intake of certain drugs during pregnancy without the advice of doctor.
- Infection to the mother during pregnancy like rubella
- Cigarette smoking, consumption of alcohol, exposure to X-rays.
- Nutritional deficiency during pregnancy.
- Exposure To Toxic Materials: Elements such as mercury, lead and cadmium are known to be linked with a reduction in intellectual growth

2. Causes at the time of birth of the child

- Birth asphyxia i.e., child does not cry or cry very late after birth.
- Pre-mature birth i.e., birth before 37 weeks of pregnancy.
- Low birth weight babies (children who weigh less than 2500 grams)
- Injury to the head of the newborn. Use of forceps can result in injury to the head.
- Delayed and prolong labor

3. Causes after the birth of the child

- Malnutrition or deficiency of nutrition during the first two years of the life
- Brain infection and brain injuries
- Untreated epileptic fits or high grade fever with fits
- Severe dehydration during the childhood
- Free exposure to gas fumes, paints, lead etc.

4. Psychosocial deprivation i.e. deprivation of love and affection and emotional disturbances.

5. **Illness:** Children suffering from measles can develop encephalitis which causes mental retardation. Infants suffering from congenital hyperthyroidism are also at the risk of poor brain development [4].

Characteristics of Mentally Disabled Children

- **Bad Memory:** These kids have a short-term memory recall. However, when doing a task

repeatedly, they can recall information without displaying any symptoms of mental retardation.

- **Slow Learning Curve:** Their ability to process new information is relatively low when compared to other kids. That does not mean they are incapable of learning. Some educationists are of the view that a slowing down of the instructions can help in better reception of the information.
- **Attention Deficiency:** They are unable to sustain their attention for too long on a single task. A good way of tackling this deficiency is by making them aware of the most crucial aspect of the work and then building their attention from there on.
- **Disinterest:** Due to repeated failures, some children don't trust their skills, even if they are correct. Over time they lose faith in their abilities and become disinterested in learning [5].
- **Independent Living:** One of the brighter side children with special needs can be trained in repetitive tasks which they can master over time. This can help them stay independent for a short duration of time and also prepare them for adulthood.
- **Inability to Restrain Emotions:** As children grow older, they can give measured responses when faced with unknown situations. Children with mental disabilities are unable to do this and may respond unpredictably, usually displaying aggression. Once the episode is over, they can sense that they have misbehaved and are capable of feeling like they are a burden.
- **Social Development:** Due to bizarre outbursts and poor language skills, they may be unable to have healthy social interactions.
- **Application of New Ideas:** They are unable to incorporate any newly acquired skills, innovatively.
- **Physical characteristics:** Some of the commonly seen physical characteristics in severely mentally challenged children are: Head is too large, slanting eyes, protruded tongue, abnormal physical appearance and rough skin [6].

Problems Faced By Mentally Retarded Children

Common challenges faced by developmentally disabled children are as follows:

- **Social Isolation:** Perceived as slow, these kids are often ostracized by their peers. All it takes is one rumor, and most kids would start avoiding a mentally disabled child. Not just those, even the ones who try to befriend them are ridiculed

- **Bullying:** People fear what they can't understand and hate what they can't conquer. The inability of children or even adults to understand the needs of a mentally disabled child can breed hatred, fear and contempt. Many kids with disabilities must face ridicule from their peers and are often called unflattering names.
- **Low Self Esteem:** Consistently poor academic performance can have a negative impact on their psyche. Complex topics might be difficult to grasp for any child. However, poor academic performance in natural subjects where their peers outclass them may make them have a low opinion of themselves.
- **Loneliness:** Due to social isolation and bullying, many children with mental disabilities suffer from loneliness.
- **Medical Problems:** Children that suffer from profound mental retardation are likely to have other health complications as well. These could include reduced vision, hearing issues, poor motor function, etc [6].

Signs and Symptoms of Mentally Challenged Children

At the time of the birth, it is not possible to predict whether the child will be normal or mentally challenged until some complications have developed during delivery. Within six months of the life we can judge the normality or abnormality. Mentally challenged children manifest various sign & symptoms, these are as following:-

- Have delayed milestones.
 - 1) Delayed development of motor skills and are slow to roll, sit and stand.
 - 2) Delayed language development and are slower to use the words, put the words together and speak in complete sentence
- Misplacing objects
- Slow in responding.
- Are irritable and restless.
 - Show disinterest in studies
 - Repeated academic failures
 - Poor academic performance
 - Difficulty in articulating a point
 - Having trouble remembering things
 - Difficulty with problem solving skills
 - Poor in social skills and learning sentences.
 - Do not keep up with other children of the same age
 - Take long time to learn simple day to day activities

- Not able to do daily activities like dressing & feeding.
- Slow in learning or can concentrate for a short time
- Not able to learn adaptive behaviors such as self-help or self-care skills like dressing, feeding themselves, combing, brushing etc.
- Behavioral Symptoms such as Aggression, Depression, Anxiety, tendency to inflict injury on self, Suicidal thoughts, Poor interpersonal relationships, Excessive dependency on parents, Unable to respond to situations in a measured manner, Low attention span, explosive outbursts, temper tantrums and physically aggressive behaviours [7].

Diagnosis

1. **Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale:** This test gauges quantitative reasoning, knowledge, fluid reasoning, visual-spatial processing and memory. It is one of the primary tests that identify learning disorders in children.
2. **Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children:** This test is used to assess the cognitive development of a child. The types of tests administered are wide-ranging and vary based on the age of the child. This test is not a stand-alone test, meaning that the results of this analysis must be seen in conjunction with other tests.
3. **Bayley Scale of Infant Development:** This is a standardized test for infants between 1-42 months of age. Motor, language and cognitive skills are tested. This, in turn, helps to screen out children who are prone to having development problems in the future [8].

Treatment

There is no medical "cure" for mental retardation. However, there are ways in which you can enrich their lives and help them have a pleasant childhood.

1. **Stem Cell Therapy:** This can be beneficial for children who have Down Syndrome. While it cannot eliminate Down Syndrome, it can help repair any damaged cells which help in improving their cognitive abilities.
2. **Acupuncture:** Studies have shown that children who given this form of treatment saw a marked increase in IQ tests as well as social skills.
3. **Home Schooling:** As the pace of learning is slow, homeschooling is a good option where the child can thrive in a protected environment. If the child is auditory rather than visual, the entire learning experience can be changed based on the

4. child's needs. This flexibility would not be available in schools.
5. **Special Needs Schools:** These schools have other children with disabilities studying under the same roof. The classes are conducted at a slower pace, and hence the children can grasp the concepts quickly [9].

Prevention

If you doubt that your child lacks mental abilities the first thing to be done is to assess to what degree your child is mentally retarded. Approach a professional who can test your child's IQ and age expectations to see if he is mildly or severely challenged. Child's doctor and the psychologist confirm the diagnosis by conducting standardized test on intellectual functioning. Once your child is tested a mentally challenged one, equip yourself with knowledge on mental retardation. Find out the causes, types of mentally challenged and how to cope with it. Special care and attention are essential for a mentally retarded child to cope

1. When the person is going to get married:
 - Avoid marriages in blood relations like cousin brothers, cousin sisters etc.
 - Get married before 35 years of age
 - Have children before the age of 35 years.
2. Pregnant mothers
 - Intake of good nutritious diet
 - Regular antenatal check up
 - Immunization against mumps, measles rubella well before pregnancy
 - Avoid injury or heavy pressure during the pregnancy
 - Avoid exposure to the radiation
 - Avoid taking large doses of vitamins and hormones as these cause birth defects
 - Pregnant women should avoid doing drugs, smoking or drinking as it can lead to neural defects in the child.
 - Women suffering from hyperthyroidism need to get treated as it can lead to a fetus with neural defects.
3. Consult the child specialist if child.
 - Has repeated infection
 - Has delayed milestones
 - Is very irritable and restless
 - Has difficulty in speaking
 - Treat high fever/infection
4. Avoid malnutrition by providing well balanced diet

5. Ensure that the child has an environment which can provide opportunities for intellectual stimulation and for play
6. Children should be immunized against diseases that cause mental disorders such as measles.

Parenting Tips to Help in Raising A Child with an Intellectual Disability

Parents can play a significant role in treating and raising a child with an intellectual disability. Here are a few tips to help build a differently-abled child

1. **Encourage Independence:** Children with mental disabilities have a slow learning curve. A parent telling their child that he cannot do anything will make him even more dependent and foster low self-esteem. One method to make kids independent is by breaking down complex tasks/ideas into simple ones.
2. **Follow Up On Academic Progress:** Be active at parent-teacher meetings to find out what are the strengths and weaknesses of your child. Parent-teacher conferences can be an excellent forum where you can keep track of your child's development. It can also be a place where a healthy exchange of ideas can take place.
3. **Socialize:** Many parents limit their child's interactions with others in a bid to protect them. Then there are others who wish to avoid unpleasant situations. While these are legitimate reasons, making a child socially active would foster a sense of normalcy.
4. **Network:** Taking care of a child with disabilities is difficult for parents. Often there are instances when parents go into depression or bickering takes place between the couple. It can be helpful to know that there are other parents out there who are going through the same ordeal. Networking helps parents a lot, as it not just acts as a support group but also becomes a place where parents can share their experiences and ideas to come up with new ways of raising kids with disabilities
5. **Educate Themselves:** Raising a mentally challenged child may be difficult, and counseling sessions with experts can help in overcoming these difficulties
6. **Routine:** Develop a habit that can be followed by your kid as it can help them feel secure. School can be stressful, and a safe environment at home with a predictable routine can help them feel secure.
7. **Praise and Reward:** Due to the challenges they face every day, low self-esteem issues are typical, and they need constant appreciation and affection to overcome those. Encouragement through a reward system can help boost their

self-confidence. However, avoid any negative punishments as it is likely to demotivate them.

8. **Behaviour Management:** Children with mental disabilities may find it difficult to cope with certain situations. In such cases, it is essential that they don't dwell on their inability to comprehend those things. Diverting their mind would be a good idea in such situations. Something as simple as giving them headphones and making them listen to music would help in diverting their mind

Special Schools and Centers for Learning

The earlier in a child's life that the mental problem is detected the better it is for everyone concerned. There are many special schools as well as child guidance centers that provide the necessary environment for your child to grow and learn in. These environments not only help the child when it comes to education but also in developing social skills. It also gives them the opportunity to spend time and get to become friends with other mentally challenged children. If a parent shuns these special learning facilities studies have shown that this can lead to greater problems for the mentally challenged child in terms of emotional as well as social difficulties. Special schools teach mentally challenged children the skills they need to grow and learn in the world. The tasks the child is given are geared towards his mental growth in as far as he is able to learn, expand and grow. For example, sensory training and perceptual knowledge are taught to mentally challenged children and these are stressed to a great extent and practices many times over. Children are also given tasks in schools that help them to become as independent as they possibly can be. The training allows mentally challenged children a sense of accomplishment and helps to build their sense of self into a positive one [10].

Schemes for the Welfare of Mentally Challenged Children

Government of India launched lots of scheme for the welfare of mentally challenged children some of them are as follow

1. **ADIP Scheme (Assistance to Disabled Person):** Under this scheme aids /appliances are distributed to the needy persons with disabilities.
2. **Deen Dayal Disabled Rehabilitation Service scheme (DDRS):** Under this scheme, funds for the welfare of physically disabled and mentally challenged are provided to the Non Governmental Organization for projects like special schools for physically and mentally

challenged, Vocational Training Centre, Half Way Homes etc.

3. **Nirmaya:** It is the new Health Insurance Plan for mentally challenged launched by ICICI Lombard. The annual premium charged is quite low which covers routine medical checkup, therapy to corrective surgery and transportation.
4. LIC has introduced a new plan **Jeewan Vishwas** for the benefit of physically or mentally challenged children.
5. Physically and mentally challenged people are also provided 75% concession during railway travel and 50% concession during air travel [9].

Some Special Schools and Centres for Mentally Challenged

1. Amrita Rehabilitation Center, 117/K/ /100, P.O. Naveen Nagar, Kakadeo, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh 208005, Phone: 5127851832620
2. Aanchal School, Kautilya Marg, New Delhi-110021 Phone number: 2301 4165 28
3. National Institute For Mentally Handicapped (NIMH)
4. Aasha Kiran, Avantika Complex, Rohini Sector 1, New Delhi-110085, Phone number: 716 0142, 727 2760
5. Muskaan, A-28, Hauz Khas, New Delhi-110016 , Phone number: 6566766
6. Asha Jyoti School, Address: C-331/1, Indira Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh 226016, Phone: 0522 654 6122
7. Sankalp Special School (for Children with special Needs), 121/396, Shastri Nagar Chauraha, Industrial Estate, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh 208005, Phone: 093072 67489
8. Sanket (Government Deaf and Dumb School) Lucknow, Agra, Bareilly, Farrukhabad, Gorakhpur
9. Sparsh (Government School for Visually Impaired girls/boys) Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Banda, Saharanpur and Meerut
10. Mamta (State School for Mentally Challenged boys/girls) Lucknow and Allahabad
11. Prayas (State School for physically disabled children) Lucknow
12. Model School For Mentally Deficient Children, Kasturba Niketan, Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi-24 , Phone number: 6834328
13. Delhi Society For The Welfare Of Mentally Retarded Children, Okhla Centre, Okhla Marg, opposite Holy Family Hospital, New Delhi-110025, Phone number: 6310979

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