

ABSTRACT

Children with special educational needs:
A retrospective study at the Child Guidance Clinic
in Port of Spain, Trinidad

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This study examined the range of handicapped children who presented with special educational needs at the Child Guidance Clinic in Trinidad and Tobago, and explored the nature of the relationship between a number of demographic and clinical variables and diagnostic categories, and further examined the question of whether or not, their special educational needs were being met by the educational system. A select sample of all children seen at the Child Guidance Clinic for the years 1984, 1986, and 1988, was drawn from the population. Seven hundred and forty-one children, 433 males and 308 females, were seen during these years, and their case notes were reviewed in detail. Of this total, 406 fulfilled the research criteria and were included in the study. Non-parametric single sample chi-square tests were done where appropriate, and a contingency calculation was used to measure the extent of association between the educational placement at intake, and the educational placement after evaluation. The study suggested a number of significant relationships between demographic, clinical and diagnostic variables. Important demographic findings included that more than half of all the children seen at the Child Guidance Clinic had special educational needs; the mean age at presentation was 7.6 years; the male:female ratio was 2.4:1; 85% of the referrals

were initiated by physicians and schoolteachers; and the special educational needs of 80% of the children were not being met by the educational system. Important clinical findings were an excess of obstetrical complications; a significant number of handicapped children with a history of severe infectious diseases; the presence of convulsions in 8.9% of children with handicaps; and the presence of behavioural difficulties in 40% of handicapped children. Based on the findings of the study recommendations are made, and an educational model is proposed to address the needs of the handicapped child who presents with educational difficulties.

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