

PSYCHIATRY DISORDERS, MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

June 24-25, 2019 | Philadelphia, USA

Fabricia Signorelli Galeti, J Ment Health Aging 2019, Volume 3

OUTCOMES OF BEHAVIORAL, EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS AND ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN BORN PRETERM WITH VERY LOW BIRTH WEIGHT AT 4-5 YEARS AGE

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Introduction: Every year 15 million babies are born prematurely, around the world. Prematurity and low weight is important cause of mortality and morbidity.

Objectives: Compare the frequency of emotional/behavioral problems and adaptive behavior and associated factors in children born preterm and at term.

Methods: Cross-sectional study.

Inclusion Criteria: Children at 4-5 years born preterm (PT) with birth weight <1500g and children born at term (T). Genetic syndromes, congenital malformation and severe motor, visual and hearing disabilities were excluded. Emotional/behavioral problems were assessed by strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) and adaptive behavior by vineland adaptive behavior scale (Vineland-II). Categorical variables were compared by X² or Fisher's test. Factors associated with impairments were tested by linear regression. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Gestational age (weeks) and birth weight of 23PT and 22T children were 29.8 ± 2.2 and 1236 ± 185 g and 39.5 ± 1.3 and 3347 ± 350 g. Maternal age, socioeconomic level and education were similar in both groups. Children with difficulties (PT% x T%): total SDQ (13 x 18, $p = 0.47$), hyperactivity/inattention (52 x 27, $p = 0.080$), conduct (26 x 18, $p = 0.39$), emotional (30 x 23, $p = 0.56$) and peer relationship (4 x 32, $p = 0.020$). Delay in adaptive behavior: adaptive behavior composite (48 x 18, $p = 0.035$), communication (52 x 23, $p = 0.042$), daily living skills (30 x 23, $p = 0.56$), socialization (48 x 46, $p = 0.87$), motor skills (30 x 18, $p = 0.34$), fine motor skills (52 x 23, $p = 0.042$). Maternal education <9 years was associated with scores (95% CI) of total SDQ (4.4, -0.5 to 9.2, $p = 0.075$) conduct (1.3, -0.1 to 2.7, $p = 0.073$) and hyperactivity/inattention (4.2, 1.6 to 6.8, $p = 0.002$), daily living skills (-8.2, -16.2 to -0.27, $p = 0.043$) and socialization (-5.5, -11.9 to 0.9, $p = 0.089$). Preterm birth was associated with peer relationship (-1.3 -2.3 to 0.2, $p = 0.020$) and motor development (-7.0 -15.0 to 1.0), $p = 0.086$). Male sex was associated with hyperactivity/inattention (2.4, 0.5 to 4.2, $p = 0.014$), communication (-7.2, -12.4 to -2.0, $p = 0.008$) and socialization (-4.4, -8.9 to -0.1, $p = 0.055$).

Conclusions: Emotional/behavioral and adaptive problems were more frequent in preterm than in term children and were increased by low maternal education and male sex. Identification and early intervention may minimize sequel.

BIOGRAPHY

Fabricia Signorelli Galeti has 12 years of experience as a psychiatrist, specialized in childhood and adolescent psychiatry at State University of Campinas where she is currently a member of the Preschoolers Developmental Assessment Outpatients Clinic. She completed her Masters Degree in developmental disorders from Mackenzie Presbyterian University and Federal University of São Paulo and she is currently a psychiatrist and researcher at the Autism Spectrum Disorder Clinic from Mackenzie Presbyterian University and at the Preterms outpatients clinic at the Neonatal Division, Department of Pediatrics from the Federal University of São Paulo.

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