

PEER DIFFICULTIES IN CHILDREN WITH EPILEPSY: ASSOCIATION WITH
MEDICAL, NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL, ACADEMIC, AND BEHAVIORAL
FACTORS

Elena Harlan Drewel

Dr. Debora Bell, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Children with epilepsy have more peer difficulties than do healthy children or children with other health conditions (i.e., asthma and diabetes). Few studies have investigated which variables relate to peer problems in children with epilepsy. This study examined if variables directly associated with peer difficulties in typically developing children such as inattentive behavior, anxious behavior, and academic achievement were also associated with peer difficulties in children with epilepsy. Neuropsychological functioning and seizure characteristics (i.e., age at epilepsy onset, seizure status), were also examined. Results revealed that, except for the correlations of seizure status to age at epilepsy onset, neuropsychological functioning, and academic achievement, all study variables were related to one another. Anxious behavior mediated the relations between neuropsychological functioning and peer difficulties and seizure status and peer difficulties; inattentive behavior mediated the association between neuropsychological functioning and peer difficulties; neuropsychological functioning mediated the relation between age at epilepsy onset and inattentive behavior, anxious behavior, and academic achievement. Hence, interventions for treating peer difficulties in children with epilepsy may wish to target inattentive and anxious behaviors. Also, given that neuropsychological functioning and seizure status are associated with behavior problems, these may be important to include in the assessment and intervention process as well.