

Cognitive abilities, mood changes and adaptive functioning in children with beta thalassaemia

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A case-control study was conducted at the Thalassaemia clinic, Abu El-Reesh Children Hospital; Cairo University, One Hundred children with transfusion-dependent thalassaemia were included in the study group by consecutive sampling and compared to 100 normal children matched for age and sex and of similar socioeconomic standard. Age ranged between 5 and 15years. Cases and controls were assessed by the WISC-III to measure cognitive and intellectual abilities, the CDI to measure depressive symptoms, and the Vineland Adaptive Functioning Scale to measure a broad range of adaptive functions. Results showed that patients with thalassaemia showed a significantly worse performance on all tests. Apart from two subtests that are usually not affected by intellectual deterioration, all WISC-III subtests were significantly lower in Thalassaemia patients. They also showed as much as three times higher levels of depressive symptoms and their adaptive functioning is impaired in all domains assessed Conclusions: Thalassaemia major exerts a dramatic influence on the mental health of affected children. The mental health problems are broad in range and severity. They are mostly due to the impact of a chronic illness on the daily life of children. However, a direct influence on brain functioning during development cannot be excluded .An assessment questionnaire should be integrated in the regular follow up clinical assessment of thalassaemia major patients for the early detection and management of psychological disturbance.