PERSONALITY TRAITS IN SCHOOL CHILDREN WITH EPILEPSY

NEVEN SIKIC, GORDANA BULJAN-FLANDER¹, ANDREA MARCELJA¹ and VLATKA MEJASKI-BOSNJAK¹

Health Coitcr, Ministry of Interior, and Children's University Hospital, Zagreb

An alternative way of looking at epilepsy has been restricted to the observation of personality characteristics and behavioral cognitive impairments, as these are the most important secondary handicaps. The term "behavioural disorders" is connected with the problem of the development of personality. For this reason, in clinical work a sensitive and standardized psychometric instruments for measuring personality constructs are required. One of the most frequent used instruments in our child neurowork is Eysenck's Personality Inventory (EPI — junior questionnaire), based on Eysenck's theory. In this study, EPI-junior questionnaire was given to a group of 60 boys and girls aged 10-14 years with various forms of epilepsy (single partial seizures — N = 28; complex partial seizures — N = 18; typical absence — N = 8; atypical absence — N = 6. All children were receiving anticonvulsant drugs in doses within or below therapeutic limits. The possible influence of drug administration on personality characteristics of these children was not specifically analyzed for insufficient data in their medical histories.

Results of personality characteristics obtained on the EPI junior test of the children with epilepsy were compared to the results of "normal" school children matched by age, sex and social conditions. It was found (on the "extroversion-introversion" scale) that the children with epilepsy were more introverted than the control group children, which is contrary to the common clinical experience.

On the other hand, there were no statistical differences between these two groups in the category of "neuroticism". Finally, the children with epilepsy had significantly higher results on the "lie scale", which indicated greater unreliability of their results obtained on EPI-junior "lie" scale as compared to the control group. It is possible that the children with epilepsy were afraid of stigmatisation and social isolation. It is also possible that they were trying to adapt to their parents' expectations. An additional explanation could be that by giving socially desirable answers, the children with epilepsy tried to hide their neuroticism.

Key words: children, epilepsy, personality characteristics, behavioural and cognitive impairments, Eysenck's theory, EPI-junior questionnaire