

## **TREATMENT OF SPEECH PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN WITH ADHD AS A PREVENTIVE MEASURE OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

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The present study focuses on the expression of the linguistic behaviour in Attention Deficit – Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as well as its role in the treatment of this disorder and its relationship with subsequent learning difficulties. It is well known that one of the most prominent associated characteristics of ADHD is language impairment. However, most studies usually focus on difficulties in phoneme discrimination and articulation, vocabulary, syntax and grammar use. The aim of the study was to investigate the ability of children with ADHD to interpret figurative language in relation to other linguistic abilities. Figurative language is an aspect of pragmatics and its use presupposes linguistic, communicative and cognitive skills. Thus, the relation between figurative language and symptoms of ADHD may further highlight children's learning abilities. Participants in this study were 20 children diagnosed with ADHD who attended an intervention program for less than 3 months and 20 children diagnosed with ADHD who attended an intervention program for more than 3 months aged 6-11 years. The control group was matched for age, gender and IQ. Expressive and receptive language was assessed with the Verbal IQ Test (Stavrakaki & Tsimpli 2000). Figurative language was assessed with two separate tasks which focus on understanding multiple meanings in and out of context. Results demonstrated that both clinical groups received lower scores in all language assessments compared to the control group. Moreover, the two clinical groups did not differ in productive vocabulary, comprehension and production of syntax and interpretation of figurative language in context. However, the clinical group which attended the intervention program for more than three months received higher scores in the task assessing the interpretation of figurative language out of context ( $t=-2.6$ ,  $p=0.018$ ). Also, a significant correlation was found between inattentiveness and the ability to interpret figurative language out of context ( $r=0.733$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). These results support a causal relation between inattentiveness and pragmatic skills. Discussion emphasizes the need for the incorporation of several language aspects in a therapeutic program of ADHD, mainly during the preschool years, as an essential preventive measure of learning difficulties.