

Since there is no definitive test to determine whether a child is hyperactive, no accurate statement is possible of the incidence of the syndrome. One estimate is that between two and three per cent of children in elementary school in Canada are hyperactive.⁸³

132. Hyperactivity can damage the mother-child bond: equally, a weak bond can intensify a tendency toward hyperactivity.⁸⁴ Research has found children behaving with hyperactivity who had poor sleeping habits and who frequently suffered from parental rejection because of these habits. Even at 18 months of age these children were becoming scapegoats in families which clearly had difficulty dealing with them. A study conducted over a number of years indicates that while hyperactivity tends to diminish with age, some disabilities persist. These include emotional immaturity and poor self-image.⁸⁵ One optimistic finding was that antisocial behaviour in the subjects studied over a period of time seemed to have lessened.⁸⁶

133. Generally speaking, the hyperactive adolescent is a male sixteen and under who performs poorly in school, has "continuing difficulties paying attention, poor impulse control, poor peer relationship, poor self-image and a high risk of antisocial or delinquent behaviour."⁸⁷

134. Some hyperactive children turn out well while a few others become antisocial or criminal. In this process the environment in which they grow and the way they are treated by their parents are of crucial importance. The influence of good parenting was illustrated in recent research in the United States.⁸⁸ Boys who were similar in age, I.Q. and symptoms of hyperkinesis were found to differ in interpersonal behaviour, including aggressiveness, depending on the type of parenting they received and on their socioeconomic status.

135. The innately gifted child who is socially rebellious is a problem to himself and to society. These children share many of the characteristics of the general predelinquent and delinquent population, that is, they have "repressive, indifferent, unstable, broken or non-existent families", have a poor self-image caused by repeated failures and are treated as outcasts and failures by society.⁸⁹ But these children also have unique handicaps.

136. The intellectually gifted children who are at risk of developing a criminal lifestyle are a minority within the minority of children in trouble. Very little attention has been paid to their plight by research workers (there being only one passing reference to them in the course of our hearings).⁹⁰ Public agencies are geared to assist problem children of average intelligence; indeed, "up to now, efforts to consider ability differentials in working with children in trouble have almost always been on the side of slower children."⁹¹ Lacking special facilities, these gifted children are left to devote their natural abilities and leadership