
Recognizing agitated children as disabled in France

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Abstract

Agitated children are a major concern in France. Beyond the debate on how Public Education should treat them, there has been for many years a deep scientific controversy on the origin of agitation. Defenders of a neurological perspective have developed treatments and procedures around the category of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Many French health professionals are however not convinced by the scientific basis of this category and tend to see hyperactivity as a symptom and not as a diagnostic. Among them, psychanalysts are particularly opposed to this diagnostic and propose to analyze agitated children with other approaches, using psychotherapy rather than drugs. Another debate about these children concerns the boundary between social and medical problems. Many of these children live indeed in poor social conditions, which are often invoked to explain their agitation. When and why their comportment can be seen as pathological? One of the institutions which have to answer this question is, since a law on disability in 2005, the "Departmental Houses for Disability" (MDPH in french: maisons départementales des personnes handicapées). These institutions have to treat the applications of people who claim for a recognition of a disability. Some of the agitated children are considered as disabled, even if the majority of them are not. We propose to analyze these questions through a study on the life courses of agitated children in France, which is still in progress. One part of this research, which will be specifically mobilized here, concerns two MDPH located in two different French areas. In both institutions, we have led observations, interviews and data collection. The observations have been conducted during the evaluation of the applications by multidisciplinary teams (which have to prepare the official decisions) and during meetings between physicians who work for the institution and families who claimed for a recognition of a disability for an agitated child. The interviews were led with both professionals and families. Lastly, the data collection has concerned 200 applications in each MDPH we studied. Based on this material, our communication will deal with the following questions: how, under which circumstances and with which consequences can agitation lead to disability? Finally, using some supplementary elements of the global research, we will propose a reflection on the consequences of the recognition of a disability on the life courses (in medical, educational, family and administrative fields) of these children.

Keywords: children, life course, disability policy, agitation, school

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