

Research on consequences: Hyperactive girls face problems as adults

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Young girls who are hyperactive are more likely to get hooked on smoking, under-perform in school or jobs and gravitate towards mentally abusive relationships as adults, according to a joint study by researchers from the Université de Montréal and the University College London (UCL).

The study, published in the latest issue of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, followed 881 Canadian girls from the ages of six to 21 years to see how hyperactive or aggressive behaviour in childhood could affect early adulthood. The research team found that one in 10 girls monitored showed high levels of hyperactive behaviour. Another one in ten girls showed both high levels of hyperactive and physically aggressive behaviour.

“Few studies have looked at the consequences of aggressive and hyperactive behaviour in girls,” said UCL lead researcher, Nathalie Fontaine. “This study shows that hyperactivity combined with aggressive behaviour in girls as young as six years old may lead to greater problems with abusive relationships, lack of job prospects and teenage pregnancies.”

Girls with hyperactive behaviour (restlessness, jumping up and down, a difficulty keeping still or fidgety), while girls exhibiting physical aggression (fighting, bullying, kicking, biting or hitting) were found to have a high risk of developing adjustment problems in adulthood.

The study also found that hyperactive or aggressive girls were more vulnerable to grow into smoking, psychologically abusive partners and poor performance in school. What's more, females with both hyperactivity and physical aggression reported physical and psychological aggression towards their partner, along with early pregnancy and dependency on welfare.

"Our study suggests that girls with chronic hyperactivity and physical aggression in childhood should be targeted by intensive prevention programmes in elementary school, because they are more likely to have serious adjustment problems later in life," cautioned Dr. Fontaine. "Programmes targeting only physical aggression may be missing a significant proportion of at-risk girls. In fact, our results suggest that targeting hyperactive behaviour will include the vast majority of aggressive girls."

Not all hyperactive and physically aggressive girls, however, grow up with serious adjustment problems, according to co-author Richard Tremblay, a professor of psychology, pediatrics and psychiatry and director of the Research Unit on Children's Psycho-Social Maladjustment at the Université de Montréal and Sainte-Justine Hospital.

"We found that about 25 per cent of the girls with behavioural problems in childhood did not have adjustment problems in adulthood, although more than a quarter developed at least three adjustment problems," Dr. Tremblay said, noting additional research is needed into related social aggression such as rumour spreading, peer group exclusion. "We need to find what triggers aggression and how to prevent such behavioural problems."

Source: University of Montreal

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