

# Gender differences in risk pathways for adolescent substance abuse and early adult alcoholism

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Clinically ascertained reports suggest that boys and girls with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may differ from each other in their vulnerability to substance use problems, say the researchers of the University of Helsinki and University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

A total of 1545 Finnish adolescents were assessed for DSM-IV-based [ADHD](#) symptoms by their parents and classroom teachers using standardized rating scales at age 11-12 years. At age 14, substance use disorders and psychiatric co-morbidity were assessed with the Semi-Structured Assessment for the Genetics of Alcoholism, providing DSM-III-R/DSM-IV diagnoses for Axis I disorders. At age 17.5, substance use was assessed by multi-item questionnaire.

Baseline ADHD symptoms were less common among girls than boys, but among girls they were more predictive of adverse substance use outcomes once conduct disorder and previous [substance use](#) were controlled for. Only in females were baseline ADHD symptoms significant predictors of alcohol abuse and dependence and [illicit drug](#) use at age 14. At the age of 17.5, parents' reports of inattentiveness and hyperactivity were significant predictors for frequent alcohol use in both sexes, but they were more predictive of frequent alcohol and illicit drug use in girls.

Impulsivity in teachers' ratings predicted frequent alcohol use and illicit

drug use in boys. Parental reports of inattentiveness in their 11-/12-year-old daughters were a consistent predictor for illicit drug use across adolescence.

"Inattentiveness and [hyperactivity](#) may be more predictive of alcohol use disorders and maladaptive patterns of alcohol and illicit drug use among girls than boys", says psychiatrist, Dr. Elina Sihvola.

"The importance of these behavioural symptoms should be assessed further in the community, as they could jeopardize adolescents' successful transitioning into adult roles", she adds.

Provided by University of Helsinki

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