

Study suggests men diagnosed with ADHD as children had worse outcomes as adults

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Men who were diagnosed as children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) appeared to have significantly worse educational, occupational, economic and social outcomes in a 33-year, follow-up study that compared them with men without childhood ADHD, according to a report published Online First by *Archives of General Psychiatry*.

[ADHD](#) has an estimated worldwide prevalence of 5 percent, so the long-term outcome of children with ADHD is a major concern, according to the study background.

Rachel G. Klein, Ph.D., of the Child Study Center at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York, and colleagues report the adult outcome (follow-up at average age of 41 years) of boys who were diagnosed as having ADHD at an average age of 8 years. The study included 135 white men with ADHD in childhood, free of [conduct disorder](#) (probands), and a comparison group of 136 men without childhood ADHD.

"On average, probands had 2½ fewer years of schooling than comparison participants ... 31.1 percent did not complete high school (vs. 4.4 percent of comparison participants) and hardly any (3.7 percent) had higher degrees (whereas 29.4 percent of comparison participants did). Similarly, probands had significantly lower occupational attainment levels," the authors note. "Given the probands' worse educational and occupational attainment, their relatively poorer [socioeconomic status](#) at

[follow-up at average age of 41 years] is to be expected. Although significantly fewer probands than comparison participants were employed, most were holding jobs (83.7 percent). However, the disparity of \$40,000 between the median [annual salary](#) of employed probands and comparisons is striking."

In further comparisons of the two groups, the men who were diagnosed with ADHD in childhood also had more divorces (currently divorced, 9.6 percent vs. 2.9 percent, and ever been divorced 31.1 percent vs. 11.8 percent); and higher rates of ongoing ADHD (22.2 percent vs. 5.1 percent, the authors suspect the comparison participants' ADHD symptoms might have emerged during adulthood), antisocial personality disorder (ASPD, 16.3 percent vs. 0 percent) and substance use disorders (SUDs, 14.1 percent vs. 5.1 percent), according to the results.

During their lifetime, the men who were diagnosed with ADHD in childhood (the so-called probands) also had significantly more ASPD and SUDs but not mood or anxiety disorders and more psychiatric hospitalizations and incarcerations than comparison participants. And relative to the comparison group, psychiatric disorders with onsets at 21 years of age or older were not significantly elevated in the probands, the study results indicate.

The authors note the design of their study precludes generalizing the results to women and all ethnic and social groups because the probands were white [men](#) of average intelligence who were referred to a clinic because of combined-type ADHD.

"The multiple disadvantages predicted by [childhood](#) ADHD well into adulthood began in adolescence, without increased onsets of new disorders after 20 years of age. Findings highlight the importance of extended monitoring and treatment of children with ADHD," the study concludes.

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