

Validity of change in DSM-5 ADHD age of onset criterion confirmed

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A recent study published in the July 2014 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* confirms the validity of the DSM-5 change to the age of onset criterion for diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

In DSM-5, age of onset criterion for ADHD, previously set at 7 in DSM-IV, has been raised to 12. As explained in DSM-5, age of onset is now set at 12, rather than an earlier age, to reflect the importance of clinical presentation during childhood for accurate diagnosis, while also acknowledging the difficulties in establishing precise childhood onset retrospectively.

Using data from a nationally representative sample of youth who participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), a group of researchers led by Dr. Kathleen Merikangas of the National Institute of Health Intramural Research Program, evaluated symptoms of ADHD and its subtypes in 1,894 participants aged 12-15 years based on parent reports of symptomatology.

Researchers found that levels of severity, [functional impairment](#), and patterns of comorbidity among the additional 3.46% of children who met all of the ADHD criteria except age of onset under 7 were comparable with those of other mental and behavioral disorders. Although raising the [age](#) of onset criterion in DSM-5 from 7 to 12 generated an increase in the prevalence of all subtypes of ADHD, the greatest increase was found for inattention, which tends to have a later

onset than symptoms of hyperactivity that emerge earlier in development. Dr. Merikangas noted that youth with the inattention subtype of ADHD are less likely to be recognized and treated because their problems may be less apparent at school and at home. These findings highlight the importance of systematic study of diagnostic criteria in representative samples of the general population.

More information: The article "Impact of the DSM-5 ADHD Age of Onset Criterion in the U.S. Adolescent Population" by Jennifer L. Vande Voort, Jian-Ping He, Nicole D. Jameson, and Kathleen R. Merikangas, ([dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.03.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.03.005)) appears in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Volume 53, Issue 7 (July 2014).

A related editorial, "How Evidence on the Developmental Nature of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Can Increase the Validity and Utility of Diagnostic Criteria," by Drs. Guilherme Polanczyk, and Terrie E. Moffitt, is published in the same issue, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.04.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.04.012)

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