

School systems failing children with ADHD

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Credit: Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

A high number of Australian children with Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are struggling academically, with an alarming 40% of students failing to meet the literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) national minimum standards, new research by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) has found.

To date, there has been little focus on the important developmental period from childhood to adolescence, and why some adolescents with ADHD do well, while others fall further behind. This study is the first Australian study to specifically look at adolescent academic achievement and ADHD in this critical period.

In Australia, 6 - 7% of students entering high school will have ADHD. This means an estimated 5,000 Victorian students with ADHD made the transition to high school each year. We know that many of these students are likely to struggle.

While some students with ADHD are performing well, most are performing academically below grade-level averages and are placed in the lowest two NAPLAN performance bands.

Lead researcher, Nardia Zendarski said that the study shows just how large the gap is between high-achieving students and students with ADHD. "The gap is the same difference as other 'at-risk' cohorts." Without targeted support many of these teen risk being left behind by peers.

The new results published in the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics show that 40% of students are below the national minimum standard in at least one academic area, which means that they don't have the basic skills required for secondary school.

In year seven, 73% of students with ADHD had a particular problem with writing and almost 25% were below the minimum standard. In year nine, 54% of students had difficulties, and 37.5% did not reaching the minimum standard. Interestingly, difficulty with writing was much higher for boys than girls.

Teens with ADHD experience a range of other issues with some struggling in terms of academic outcomes; this can also impact their mental health, their ability to make friends and how they engage with the school community.

Ms Zendarski said that students with ADHD are at increased academic risk during the middle school and early [high school](#) period. "Especially

when we see that 40% of students failed to meet the national minimum standards in at least one academic area, i.e. writing or math, based on test results from the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)".

In addition to academic support, interventions targeting factors that the study found were associated with poor academic outcomes may improve academic achievement across this critical period. These factors included inattention, bullying, and low supervision and monitoring of the adolescent by their parents.

"We should stop focusing on the argument around whether these kids should be medicated or not and start focusing on providing services and support that they need to reach their full potential. These programs could be used to support all kids with learning difficulties.

As education is a key determinant of overall quality of life and health, I can't think of a better area to concentrate our efforts," Ms Zendarski said.

Provided by Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

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