

Study shows childhood psychiatric disorders increase risk for later adult addiction

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Children's health and well-being while growing up can be indicators of the potential health issues they may encounter years later. A study published in the July 2017 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (JAACAP)* suggests that a childhood psychiatric disorder increases the risk of developing addiction later in life. Based on a large amount of data from previous studies on these participants, the researchers identified a correlation between various psychiatric disorders among children and later risk of developing addictions.

The team, led by researchers from the Child Study group at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and Accare, the Center for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University Medical Center Groningen, the Netherlands, found that individuals diagnosed in [childhood](#) with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)/conduct disorder (CD), and depression had an increased risk of developing addictions. Interestingly, results concerning anxiety were less clear. The risk may depend on the specific type of anxiety disorder, but to date, no studies have focused on this topic.

"We know that ADHD in childhood increases the risk for later substance-related disorders, but until now, no systematic evaluation of other childhood psychiatric disorders had been conducted," said Dr. Annabeth P. Groenman, researcher at Accare, Center for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University Medical Center Groningen, the Netherlands. "Our findings show that not only ADHD increased the risk of addictions, but

that other childhood psychiatric disorders also increased risk. This indicates the importance of early detection of mental health problems in a wider group. Addiction is a major cause of immense personal, familial, and societal burden, and prevention is therefore an important goal."

The study re-analyzed data of 37 previous studies containing a total of 762,187 individuals, of whom 22,029 had ADHD, 434 had disruptive behavior disorders (such as ODD/CD), 1,433 had anxiety disorder, and 2,451 had depression. The researchers identified studies looking at childhood psychiatric disorders and later addiction.

Disruptive behaviors (ODD/CD) frequently co-occur with ADHD, in approximately 30% of cases. This so-called "comorbidity" is often thought to be the main cause of addictions in individuals with ADHD. However, the results suggest that co-occurring ODD/CD in ADHD does not fully explain the risk of addictions in this group.

Professor Jaap Oosterlaan, principal investigator of the Child Study Group at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and the Emma Children's Hospital AMC, the Netherlands, said: "Now that we have firmly established children with psychiatric disorders as a high-risk group for later substance-related [disorders](#), the next step is to make parents, clinicians, and the government aware of these risks and work together in reducing the risks for [addiction](#) and its debilitating consequences."

More information: Annabeth P. Groenman et al, Childhood Psychiatric Disorders as Risk Factor for Subsequent Substance Abuse: A Meta-Analysis, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jaac.2017.05.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2017.05.004)

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