

Increasing number of adolescents receive a psychiatric or neurodevelopmental diagnosis

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According to a national register study comparing Finnish birth cohorts from 1987 and 1997, an increasing number of adolescents receive a psychiatric or neurodevelopmental diagnosis. The number of diagnosed adolescents increased especially for girls in the younger cohort. The results of the study were published in *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

The share of girls who received a diagnosis was 10 percent in the older and 15 percent in the younger cohort. Whereas for boys, 6 percent in the older cohort and 9 percent in the younger cohort received a diagnosis. The diagnoses were recorded for both cohorts between ages 12 and 18.

Quantitatively, the most increased were girls' special health care visits related to diagnoses of depression and anxiety.

"The increase in the number of depression and anxiety diagnoses is a burden on special [health](#) care. The main form of treatment for both is psychotherapy, the availability of which is limited," notes the main author of the study, Docent David Gyllenberg.

According to Professor Andre Sourander, leader of the University of Turku research group, the study does not directly indicate an increase in the psychiatric problems of adolescents, even though the findings point out a significant increase in the adolescents' use of [mental health care](#) services.

"Naturally, it is positive that young people seek help, and those who need

it receive treatment. The study suggests that the threshold for seeking help has lowered and the stigma related to it has been reduced," says Sourander. "It would be important to examine whether adolescents with a certain diagnosis have received evidence-based treatment."

Researchers estimate that the growing burden on mental [health care services](#) should be alleviated by developing early identification and low threshold support models for [primary health care](#) in particular.

On the other hand, a significant group of adolescents is currently without [special health care](#), as the service system does not identify adolescents at risk of suicide effectively enough. Less than a third of adolescents who died by suicide had used specialised services in the six months before their death. This finding is in line with previous research results.

More information: Temporal changes in the incidence of treated psychiatric and neurodevelopmental disorders during adolescence: an analysis of two national Finnish birth cohorts. *The Lancet Psychiatry*. DOI: [10.1016/S2215-0366\(18\)30038-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(18)30038-5)

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