

Children with physical disabilities are at higher risk of poor mental health

March 23 2018

A new study from Lund University in Sweden shows that even children with limited physical disabilities are at risk of developing mental issues later in life. Girls and adolescents from socioeconomically vulnerable families are at greatest risk. The study was published in *PLOS ONE*.

With the help of national register data, Lund researchers conducted a follow-up of more than 600,000 children born to Swedish parents during the period 1987 to 1993. Of these, nearly 1 600 children had brachial plexus birth injury (BPBI), which entails damage at birth to the nerve fibres that lead to one of their arms. The degree of the children's residual impairments may vary, from barely noticeable to inability to move their arm and hand.

Once the children were in their teens, the researchers drew the following conclusions from the registry database:

- Children with BPBI used medication for [mental health](#) issues to a greater extent.
- Children from low-income families were more affected than children from families with higher socioeconomic status.
- Girls were more affected than boys, and the problems became even more severe if the girls also came from families with low socioeconomic status.

"Coming from a family with [low socioeconomic status](#) is a high risk in itself," says Elia Psouni, associate professor of developmental

psychology at Lund University. "If you are also a girl, the risk that you will suffer from [poor mental health](#) is more than twice as high than if you are a boy from a wealthy [family](#)."

Why were girls more affected? "I think it has to do with trauma and discrimination on many levels," says Elia Psouni. "In my previous research, I have seen how the experiences and consequences of school-related stress are greater in girls than in boys. As far as the children's [socioeconomic background](#) is concerned, there is already a lot of research showing that children from less fortunate families often receive less support. They often have poorer access to information and support from extended social networks and formal organizations."

With regard to potential applications of the findings, Psouni hopes for "increased awareness, which in turn will increase preparedness for and focus on mental well-being well into the late teenage years. That [children](#) will continue to receive help, even after the physical injury has been treated, by a professional team working closely with the patient."

More information: Elia Psouni et al. Psychotropic drug use as indicator of mental health in adolescents affected by a plexus injury at birth: A large population-based study in Sweden, *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0193635](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0193635)

Provided by Lund University

Citation: Children with physical disabilities are at higher risk of poor mental health (2018, March 23) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-03-children-physical-disabilities-higher-poor.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.