

Raising a child with ADHD costs five times more than raising a child without ADHD, study finds

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Raising a child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) costs American families an estimated \$5.8 billion every year—five times more than raising a child without ADHD—according to a new study by

researchers at FIU's Center for Children and Families.

This is the first study to calculate children's social, behavioral and academic difficulties into a family's cost of raising a [child](#) with ADHD.

"Despite the extensive research that has been done on the impairments related to ADHD, not much research has been done on the financial burden it has had on families," said Xin Alisa Zhao, lead author of the study and doctoral student in the FIU Department of Psychology. "A comprehensive understanding of the [financial burden](#) of raising a child with ADHD is a vital aspect of advocating for, justifying, and planning interventions for families of children with ADHD."

Children with ADHD often have academic and behavioral difficulties in the classroom that lead to [additional costs](#) for families, including private tutoring, summer classes, computer software or other learning services beyond those provided by the education system. These children also frequently lose belongings and school supplies requiring replacement, experience dismissal from [extracurricular activities](#), and miss lessons or extracurricular activities after parents have already paid fees or purchased equipment.

"On average, families of kids with ADHD spent \$15,036 per child—not including treatment—and families of kids without ADHD spent \$2,848 over the course of a child's development," said economist Timothy F. Page of the Department of Health Policy and Management in the Robert Stempel College of Public Health & Social Work. "There are other sources of elevated cost to families above and beyond medication and services directly related to treatment for ADHD that were not being accounted for in previous estimates."

In addition, teens diagnosed with ADHD in childhood have a higher rate of car accidents, likely resulting in out-of-pocket expenses due to

damaged vehicles, fines, tickets and increased costs of automobile insurance. Some families may also experience high economic burden associated with delinquency including costs of legal defense.

The study also looked at other costs related to caregiver strain and found that parents reported income loss due to being fired and changed job responsibilities, income loss from missed work, additional childcare expenses, and treatment for the parent's mental health concerns. Besides financial and occupational impact, caregivers also experienced socio-emotional burden including strained relationships between parenting partners, difficulty engaging in pleasurable social activities, high parenting stress, and substance or [alcohol problems](#).

"ADHD is the most common childhood mental health problem, which if left untreated, allows for children with mental health issues to grow into adults with more prevalent, complex and costly problems that affect the whole family," said William E. Pelham, Jr., director of FIU's Center for Children and Families. "The most important thing parents of children with ADHD can do is get help as early as possible to learn effective behavioral strategies that will help to offset some of these costs and prevent more serious issues in adulthood."

More information: Xin Zhao et al. Family Burden of Raising a Child with ADHD, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s10802-019-00518-5](#)

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