

Understanding the relationship between ADHD and entrepreneurialism

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New research shows that behavior frequently associated with ADHD, such as inattentiveness, can contribute to lower earnings over time.

The success of entrepreneurs with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) such as Virgin Group founder Richard Branson and IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad reflects the positive link between the behavioral condition and entrepreneurialism.

But while the impulsive and hyperactive behavior often associated with ADHD can be positive when creating [business](#) ideas and getting an enterprise off the ground, new research showed a link between the levels of inattentiveness shown at an early age and average earnings in adulthood.

In this study, academics from the Universities of Leeds and Sussex used data from a long-term survey which tracked different aspects of individuals' lives at the ages of 10, 32 and 42.

This included people who at the age of ten were found to have symptoms particularly associated with ADHD and measuring the extent to which different symptoms—inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness—affected their employment and earnings in adulthood.

The research showed that people who had symptoms associated with ADHD in childhood were up to 6% more likely to go on to own their own business.

However, while those who displayed 'medium-level' symptoms of inattentiveness earned an average salary of just over £29,000 at the age of 42, for those with levels of inattentiveness which was around 50% higher, earnings were an average of £2,100 lower at the same age.

Dr. Nasir Rajah, Research Fellow in Health Economics at Leeds, led the study. He says that "this research highlights the importance of early childhood behavior on later life outcomes."

Co-author Nick Williams, Professor of Enterprise at Leeds University Business School, says that "this research is the first to track the fortunes of a larger number of people over a longer period and confirms that while hyperactivity can be positive in getting a business off the ground, inattentiveness can contribute to lower earnings over time."

Co-author Professor Vassiliki Bamiatzi from the University of Sussex Business School said that the research has important implications for policy-making. She says that "while a direct positive link between entrepreneurship and [economic performance](#) is often assumed, behavioral issues such as ADHD can severely hamper this link, and this is a reality we can no longer ignore."

She added that "with our study indicating that education is a key factor against the negative associations of ADHD, careers advice provided in universities should place particular emphasis on young people with ADHD to help them understand the benefits and challenges that they might face when starting a business."

The research was published in the *Journal of Business Venturing*.

More information: Nasir Rajaha et al, How childhood ADHD-like symptoms predict selection into entrepreneurship and implications on entrepreneurial performance, *Journal of Business Venturing* (2021). doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2021.106091

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