

Children with persistent speech disorder are more likely to have problems making friends, research finds

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Children with persistent speech disorder have greater difficulty than their peers in making friends and maintaining relationships, according to

new research.

Published Jan. 17 in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry Advances*, the study was led by researchers at the University of Bristol and used data from the longitudinal study Children of the 90s (also known as the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, ALSPAC).

Researchers analyzed data collected from 7,390 participants of Children of the 90s, who attended the clinic at eight years of age. Outcomes for behavior and depression were measured using questionnaires and interviews at age 10, 11, and 14.

The study sought to address whether [children](#) with persistent speech disorder (who struggle to make themselves understood and may be difficult to understand or barely intelligible) also experience greater levels of social, emotional and behavioral difficulties (SEBD) and are therefore at risk of the associated [negative consequences](#) in older life.

The results showed that children with persistent speech disorder at age eight were more likely to show peer problems at age 10 to 11 years compared with their peers, as reported by teachers and parents. However, they appear to be no more likely than their peers to report [depressive symptoms](#) at age 10 or to become involved in antisocial and risk-taking behavior at age 11 to 14.

Identifying the relationships between persistent speech disorder and SEBD can ultimately inform education and [health services](#) to ensure that children at risk are identified and offered appropriate support.

Dr. Yvonne Wren, Associate Professor in Speech and Communication in Bristol Dental School at the University of Bristol, and lead study author, said, "Bristol's Children of the 90s has collected health data from

thousands of children throughout their lives and this gives us a unique opportunity to study persistent speech disorder in children. Our findings demonstrate that persistent speech problems can impact on other aspects of a child's development. It is therefore important to monitor and support any child with persistent speech problems throughout their [school years](#). Particularly post-COVID, when for some children, speech development was delayed by lockdown.

"Speech and Language Therapists, education and health staff need to be aware that children with persistent speech disorder are at risk of experiencing difficulties with peer relationships and emotions in school. Early intervention might also help reduce any negative consequences in older childhood and adolescence."

More information: Yvonne Wren et al, Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties associated with persistent speech disorder in children: A prospective population study, *JCPP Advances* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/jcv2.12126](https://doi.org/10.1002/jcv2.12126)

Provided by University of Bristol

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