

Disturbed childhood can lead to adult insomnia

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Parents should help their children with better sleep patterns, along with any problem behavioural issues, because this can lead to severe insomnia in middle age, a groundbreaking new study shows.

Published in *JAMA Network Open* journal today, Australian researchers have used data from a long-running UK population study to find links between moderate to severe childhood [behavioural problems](#) and insomnia in adults by the age of 42 years old.

Insomnia is the most common sleep disorder in adults, estimated to affect almost one in three people. Chronic insomnia is associated with an increased risk of mental health and other health, wellbeing and economic consequences including working capacity.

"This study shows a consistent association of behavioural problems during childhood, particularly at ages 5 and 10 years, with insomnia symptoms in adulthood," says senior author Flinders University's Robert Adams, Professor of Respiratory and Sleep

Medicine at the Adelaide Institute for Sleep Health (AISH) - a leading Australian research centre.

"The findings suggest that [early intervention](#) to manage children's externalised behaviours, such as bullying, irritability or constant restlessness, may reduce the risk of adult insomnia.

"As well as identifying sleep problems early in life, we should also identify children with moderate to severe behavioural problems that persist through childhood as potential beneficiaries of early intervention with a sleep health focus," Professor Adams says.

"This study is the first to our knowledge to suggest an unfavourable association between early-life behavioural problems in children and addressing insomnia, from a life-long perspective," says Flinders University lead author, Dr. Yohannes Adama Melaku.

"Given the cost of sleep disorders, including insomnia, to every economy and society in the world, it's another important step towards managing this endemic problem in the community," he says.

"This first study is important because we don't know exactly the childhood or early-life factors that potentially influence this outcome of insomnia and finding these connections could reduce sleep disorders in the future."

The United Kingdom 1970 Birth Cohort Study is a large-scale study of more than 16,000 babies born in a single week. The current study includes people from the cohort aged 5 (8550 participants), 10 (9090 people) and 16 years (7653) followed up to age 42 years (2012). Statistical analysis was performed from February 1 to July 15, 2019.

The Flinders University study focused on externalised behavioural problems reported by parents, including cases of restlessness,

disobedience, fighting, bullying, property damage and theft and irritability.

The research team's next paper will focus on the effect of maternal smoking during pregnancy and childhood and any impact on [insomnia](#) and related sleep issues in adults.

More information: *JAMA Network Open* (2019).
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Provided by Flinders University

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