

ADHD Follows Into Adulthood

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A new long-term study finds the majority of people diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in childhood continue to have ADHD or another psychiatric disorder in adulthood, suggesting that the condition is a chronic disorder with potentially serious outcomes.

The research, to be published Monday in the journal *Pediatrics*, identified 362 children with ADHD from the group of all children born in Rochester, Minn., between 1976 and 1982 and followed them into adulthood, for about 20 years, comparing them with 335 children in a control group without ADHD.

About 29% of those with childhood ADHD continued to meet the diagnosis for ADHD as adults, and among those who still had ADHD as adults, 80% had at least one additional disorder, the most common being alcohol dependence or abuse. Among the entire group of people with childhood ADHD, regardless of whether or not their ADHD lasted into adulthood, 57% had at least one psychiatric disorder other than ADHD. Only 35% of those in the control group had a psychiatric diagnosis of any kind as adults. Those who had ADHD as kids also had a higher rate of suicide compared with those without, though the number of individuals who died over that time period was very low.

ADHD is "a serious, chronic neurodevelopmental disorder that continues to affect the majority of children in one way or the other into adulthood," said William Barbaresi, a study author and director of the Developmental Medicine Center at Boston Children's Hospital and a pediatrics professor at Harvard Medical School.

ADHD has been a hot-button mental-health issue in recent years as rates of diagnosis and medication use have climbed dramatically both in childhood and in adulthood, prompting some public-health officials to wonder if the condition is overdiagnosed. In the U.S., the rate of diagnosis has increased by an average of 3% per year between 1997 and 2006, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Previous work looking at the persistence of ADHD over time had found that the rates of those who still had the condition in adulthood ranged substantially, from 6% to over 60%—largely studying smaller groups than the current work and those who were in psychiatric care, according to the study authors. The figures from this study of middle-class, Caucasian children may not be applicable nationwide, cautioned the authors. However, outcomes among children who have less access to medical and educational resources are, if anything, likely to be worse than in the sample, said Dr. Barbaresi.

The findings suggest that children with ADHD should receive comprehensive evaluations for related mental-health problems, according to Dr. Barbaresi.