

Hyperactivity and impulsivity in childhood associated with increased risk of social isolation

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Research led by the Social, Genetic & Developmental Psychiatry (SGDP) Centre at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology &

Neuroscience (IoPPN), King's College London, has found that children who show heightened hyperactivity or impulsivity have an increased risk of experiencing social isolation as they get older.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Open (JAACAP Open)*, investigated the associations between symptoms of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and social isolation throughout childhood.

Using data from the Environmental Risk (E-Risk) Longitudinal Twin Study, mother- and teacher-reported social isolation and ADHD symptoms of hyperactivity/impulsivity and inattention were measured in 2232 British children at ages five, seven, 10 and 12.

Researchers found that children who showed increased ADHD symptoms had a greater risk of becoming isolated later in childhood. When investigating the two sets of ADHD symptoms separately, they found children who were more hyperactive were at increased risk of experiencing social isolation as they got older. Whereas symptoms of inattention alone were not associated with social isolation.

Katherine Thompson, lead author of the study, said, "Using data from a large longitudinal study, we found that children who showed ADHD symptoms in childhood—particularly hyperactivity or impulsivity—were more likely to experience social isolation later on. Negative interactions with their peers may lead children with ADHD to become withdrawn, rejected, lonely and isolated. A focus on combating negative biases around neurodiversity in schools and [local communities](#) could help reduce experiences of social isolation for these children. Our findings suggest that social isolation should be carefully assessed in children with ADHD and that they could benefit from interventions aimed at increasing social participation and easing social challenges."

Previous research suggested that socially isolated children could be at risk for heightened symptoms of ADHD. However, this new research finds that this is not the case. Here, the researchers used more complex methods to account for each individual's pre-existing characteristics and accurately assess both directions of the association between ADHD symptoms and [social isolation](#) within the same model.

"Research suggests children with ADHD symptoms can find it difficult to register social cues and establish friendships. These social difficulties can be detrimental to many forms of physical and mental health. Our study highlights the importance in enhancing peer [social support](#) and inclusion for [children](#) with ADHD, particularly in school settings," said Professor Louise Arseneault, professor of developmental psychology at the SGDP Centre and senior author of the study.

More information: Katherine N. Thompson et al, Do Children With Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Symptoms Become Socially Isolated? Longitudinal Within-Person Associations in a Nationally Representative Cohort, *JAACAP Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jaacop.2023.02.001](#)

Provided by King's College London

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