

Risk of developing depression and anxiety is higher in those with cerebral palsy

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Adults with cerebral palsy have a higher risk of developing depression and anxiety than their peers without the condition, a new study in the journal *JAMA Neurology* reports.

A team of researchers led by Dr. Kimberley Smith from the University of Surrey and Dr. Jennifer Ryan from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, funded by Brunel University London, investigated the mental health of those with cerebral palsy and compared it with peers of a similar age, sex and socioeconomic status, who were not sufferers. Intellectual difficulties, which can affect many with the condition, were also examined to determine if they have an impact on the development of [depression](#) and [anxiety](#).

Relatively little is known about the mental health of adults with cerebral palsy as it is often considered to affect only children, despite many living with the condition into adulthood.

Researchers examined up to 28 years of UK primary care data of 1,700 adults aged 18 or older with cerebral palsy, and 5,115 adults who did not have the condition. Researchers found that the risk of depression was 28 percent higher and the risk of anxiety was 40 percent higher among adults with cerebral palsy who have intellectual difficulties compared to those without the condition.

For those who had cerebral palsy but did not have an intellectual disability, the possibility of developing depression and anxiety increased further. The risk of depression was 44 percent higher and the risk of anxiety was 55 percent higher in adults with cerebral palsy who didn't have an [intellectual disability](#), in contrast to their peers.

Lead author Dr. Kimberley Smith, Lecturer in Health Psychology at the University of Surrey, said: "More needs to be done to understand why those with cerebral palsy have a greater risk of developing depression and anxiety.

"People with cerebral palsy face unique challenges as they age which could be linked to anxiety and depression. This study has allowed us to define the issue; the next step will be to better understand why it happens so we can develop targeted mental health interventions for this population."

Cerebral palsy is a condition that affects muscle control and movement and is usually caused by an injury to the brain before, during or after birth. Latest figures from Scope, the national disability charity, has shown that cerebral palsy affects about one in every 400 children in the UK. It is anticipated by 2031 there will be a threefold increase in the number of people with cerebral palsy over the age of 65.

"These findings support the need to consider cerebral palsy as a lifelong condition and to identify and address [mental health](#) problems among people with cerebral palsy alongside physical health problems," said Dr. Jennifer Ryan, study co-author and StAR Research Lecturer at RCSI.

"Despite historically being considered a paediatric condition, the majority of with cerebral palsy live well into adulthood, and many adults with cerebral palsy experience a worsening of impairments, including a decline in mobility. We hope that the findings of the study will help accelerate a response to adults with [cerebral palsy](#) who report inadequate provision of coordinated health services worldwide."

More information: Kimberley J. Smith et al. Risk of Depression and Anxiety in Adults With Cerebral Palsy, *JAMA Neurology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1001/jamaneurol.2018.4147](#)

Provided by University of Surrey

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