

# Increased risk of psychiatric disorders in children with inflammatory bowel disease

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Drs Agnieszka Butwicka and Jonas Ludvigsson, Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics (MEB). Credit: Gunilla Sonnerbring/MEB

Children with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) run a greater risk of psychiatric disorders, according to a new study from Karolinska

Institutet in Sweden published in *JAMA Pediatrics*. The researchers claim that more psychological support and longer follow-up is needed for the children affected and their parents.

It is already known that adults with IBD ([ulcerative colitis](#) or Crohn's disease) run an increased risk of psychiatric disorders. Now a new study shows that children with IBD also run a higher risk of mental health problems.

More than 6,400 children with IBD, born between 1973 and 2013, were included in the study. Using population registers, the researchers compared the risk of psychiatric disorders later on in life with both healthy children from the [general population](#) and with the patients' own siblings. By comparing the patients with their siblings, it was possible to take a large number of so-called confounders, such as socioeconomics, lifestyle and heredity into account, factors that are known to affect the risk of psychiatric disorders in children.

During an average follow-up period of 9 years, approximately 17 percent of the children with IBD were given a psychiatric diagnosis compared with just under 12 percent of the healthy children and about 10 percent of the siblings. This means that the risk of psychiatric disorders was 1.6 times higher in children with IBD compared to Swedish children from general population. Likewise, the risk for the children with IBD was greater than for their siblings.

The higher risk applied to a number of psychiatric diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, personality disorders, ADHD and autism spectrum disorder. There was also a higher risk of suicide attempt after reaching adulthood.

"The study shows that children with IBD and their parents are in need of psychological support and longer follow-up," says Agnieszka Butwicka,

researcher at the Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet. "Special help could be offered to children who become ill at a young age and to children of parents with mental health problems.

The risk of mental health problems was greatest during the first year with IBD. The risk was particularly high for children who were diagnosed with IBD before the age of 6 years and for children of parents with psychiatric disorders.

The study is an observation study that cannot identify causality with certainty. However, according to the researchers, the results do indicate that IBD contributes to mental health problems.

"Because the risk for these [children](#) is higher compared with their own siblings, it is likely that it is IBD affecting their mental health rather than other factors such as socioeconomics, lifestyle or heredity in the family," says Jonas F. Ludvigsson, professor at the Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet.

**More information:** *JAMA Pediatrics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.2662](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.2662)

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