by Meghan Miller, PhD

Adult-Onset ADHD and Long-Term Impacts of Early Symptoms

IN THIS EDITION, we focus on longitudinal studies—studies that follow the same people over long periods of time. The new controversy of whether ADHD can first onset in adulthood is featured, as are long-term outcomes of preschool ADHD symptoms.

ADULT-ONSET ADHD

Can ADHD emerge in adulthood?

The journal *JAMA Psychiatry* recently featured two research studies focused on answering the question of whether ADHD is really a childhood-onset disorder. Currently, per the *DSM-5* definition, ADHD symptoms must be present prior to the age of twelve in order to meet diagnostic criteria. But this requirement has been called into question in recent research.

In the first study, researchers were interested in understanding differences between people with persistent, remitted, and young adult-onset ADHD. Using a birth cohort sample from Europe, they found that 22 percent of individuals who met criteria for ADHD as children continued to meet criteria in young adulthood. These individuals experienced more life impairment than the children with ADHD whose symptoms had remitted by adulthood. The study also found that 68 percent of the people who met criteria for ADHD in young adulthood had not met criteria as children.

In the second study, the researchers looked at correspondence between ADHD diagnoses at age eleven and ages eighteen to nineteen in a large Brazilian birth cohort sample. They found that only 12.6 percent of the young adults with ADHD had the disorder when they were eleven years old.

Ultimately, the question remains as to whether this "late-onset" form of ADHD is really ADHD at all, or whether it should be considered a different diagnosis altogether.

Agnew-Blais, J.C., Polanczyk, G.V., Danese, A., Wertz, J., Moffitt, T.E., & Arsenault, L. (2016). Evaluation of the persistence, remission, and emergence of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in young adulthood. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 73, 713-720.

Caye, A., Rocha, T.B., Anselmi, L., Murray, J., Menezes, A.M., Barros, F.C.,… Rhode, L.A. (2016). Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder trajectories from childhood to young adulthood: Evidence from a birth cohort supporting a late-onset syndrome. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 73, 705-712.

LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF EARLY SYMPTOMS

What are the long-term impacts of ADHD symptoms in preschoolers?

This study sought to answer the important question of how to identify preschool children with the greatest risk for long-term impairment. They found that hyperactive preschoolers had higher levels of ADHD, conduct, autism, and anxiety symptoms as adolescents or young adults, and that these relationships differed between boys and girls.

For boys, preschool hyperactivity levels most strongly predicted outcomes, whereas for girls, other factors played a stronger role, including preschool conduct and emotional problems. Overall, this study suggests that screening for hyperactivity might help identify preschoolers who are at greatest risk for later, broad-based mental health problems.

Smith, E., Meyer, B.J., Koerting, J., Laver-Bradbury, C., Lee, L., Jefferson, H., Sonuga-Barke, E.J.S. (2016). Preschool hyperactivity specifically elevates long-term mental health risks more strongly in males than females: A prospective longitudinal study through to young adulthood. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, epub ahead of print.

Meghan Miller, PhD, *is a licensed psychologist and a postdoctoral fellow at the UC Davis MIND Institute, where her research focuses on identifying the earliest behavioral manifestations of ADHD and autism spectrum disorder.*

SHUTTERSTOCK