

ADHD and Social Connectedness

HOW IS ADHD RELATED to social connectedness among youth? What factors may protect against the consequences of low social connectedness among individuals with ADHD? This month's research brief focuses on these two overarching questions.

The first study found that youth with ADHD were more likely to have lower levels of different types of social supports compared to youth without ADHD, and that greater social integration and reassurance of worth were two social factors specifically related to positive mental health for youth with ADHD.

The second study found that compared to children without ADHD, children with ADHD were reported as feeling lonelier during the COVID-19 pandemic, and suggests that higher parental hope and family cohesion may protect against such loneliness.

Overall, these studies demonstrate that social connectedness is more likely to be a challenge for individuals with ADHD. They identify areas related to social support as possible protective influences on mental health. Future studies should examine these questions with a longitudinal methodology to better understand outcomes.

Social supports and positive mental health

This study examined social supports in relation to positive mental health among youths aged 15 to 24 with and without ADHD. Although social supports may buffer against negative mental health outcomes, there is less knowledge on the specific types of social supports related to positive mental health in particular (for example, feeling like life has a sense of direction or meaning, feeling happy, feeling like one can make a contribution to society). The study was conducted with existing data for 244 youth with ADHD and 3,755 youth without ADHD in Canada.

The individuals reported on ADHD, co-occurring mental disorders, positive mental health, and five different types of social support: attachment (having close relationships with a sense of emotional security), social integration (having people who enjoy the same social activities), reassurance of worth (having people who admire one's talents and abilities), reliable alliance (having people one can count on in an emergency), and guidance (having people one can turn to for advice).

The findings indicated that youth with ADHD had lower positive mental health and more co-occurring disorders. Compared to youth without ADHD, youth with ADHD



also had lower levels of all types of social supports, except for social support related to guidance. Notably, higher social integration and reassurance of worth were related to more positive mental health for youth with ADHD. These findings indicate that specific types of social support are associated with positive mental health, suggesting potential protective factors for youth with ADHD.

Harris-Lane L, Hesson J, Fowler K, and Harris N. (2021). Positive mental health in youth with ADHD: Exploring the role of social support. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 40, 35-51.

Protective factors against loneliness

In this study, researchers explored factors associated with loneliness among children with ADHD during the pandemic. The study was conducted with two hundred and eighty parents of children with and without ADHD in Israel. Parents completed online questionnaires that examined parental perceptions of their child's loneliness, child difficulties with executive functioning, parental social involvement during virtual learning, parental levels of hope, and family cohesion levels.

Compared to children without ADHD, children with ADHD were reported by their parents as lonelier during the pandemic, having more challenges with executive functioning, and also having higher parental social involvement, lower family cohesion,

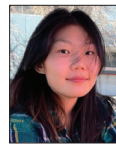
and less parental hope. Greater child executive functioning challenges were related to more child loneliness through higher parental social involvement and less parental hope.

Family cohesion was a potential protective factor such that the association between executive functioning and loneliness was lesser when there was higher family cohesion. As well, higher levels of parental hope were related to lower child loneliness. This study suggests that family cohesion and parental hope may buffer against loneliness during the pandemic for children with ADHD.

Laslo-Roth R, George-Levi S, and Rosenstreich E. (2021). Protecting children with ADHD against loneliness: Familial and individual factors predicting perceived child's loneliness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 180, 1-6.



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